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ISSUE 161
FALL 2022

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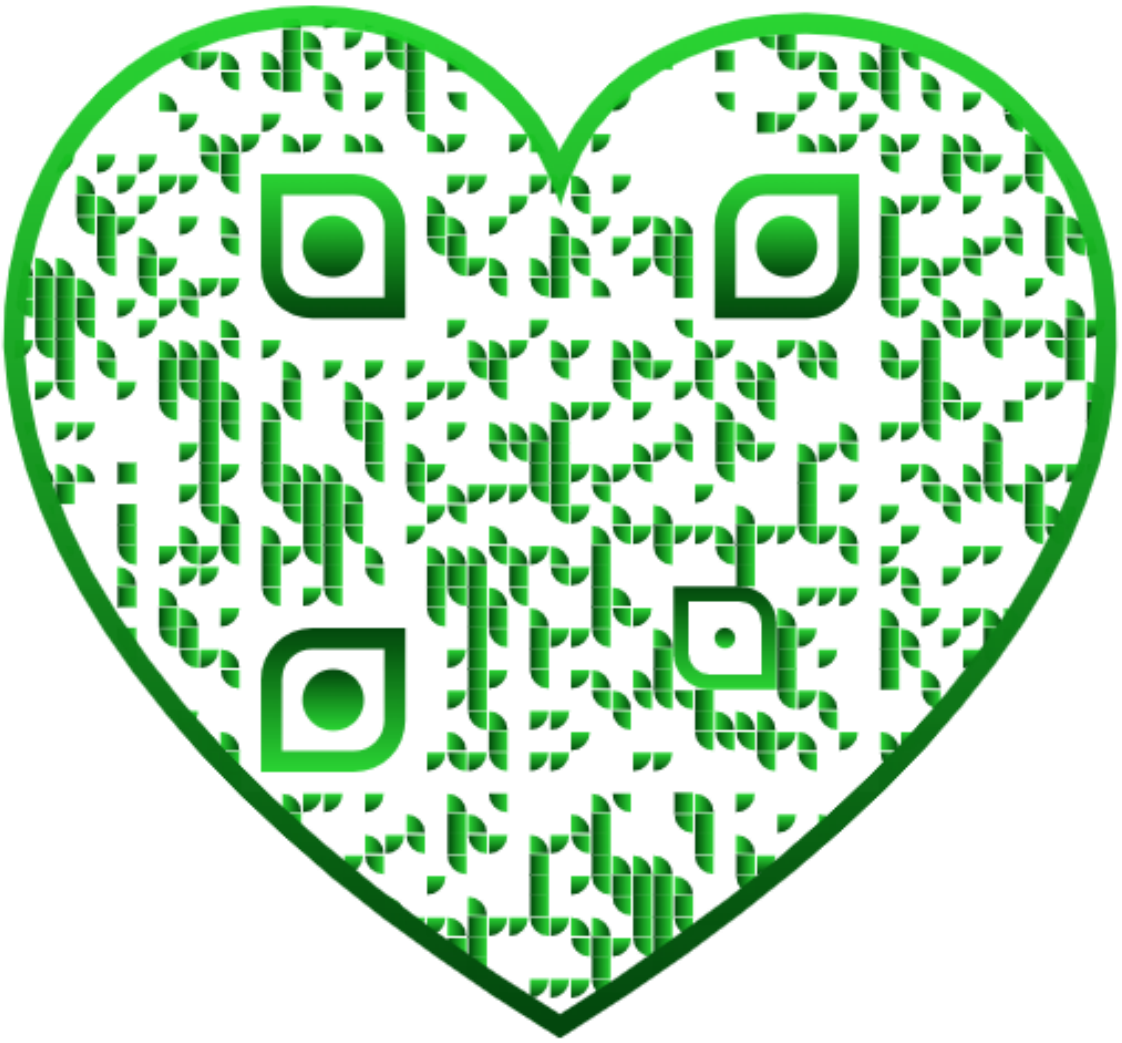

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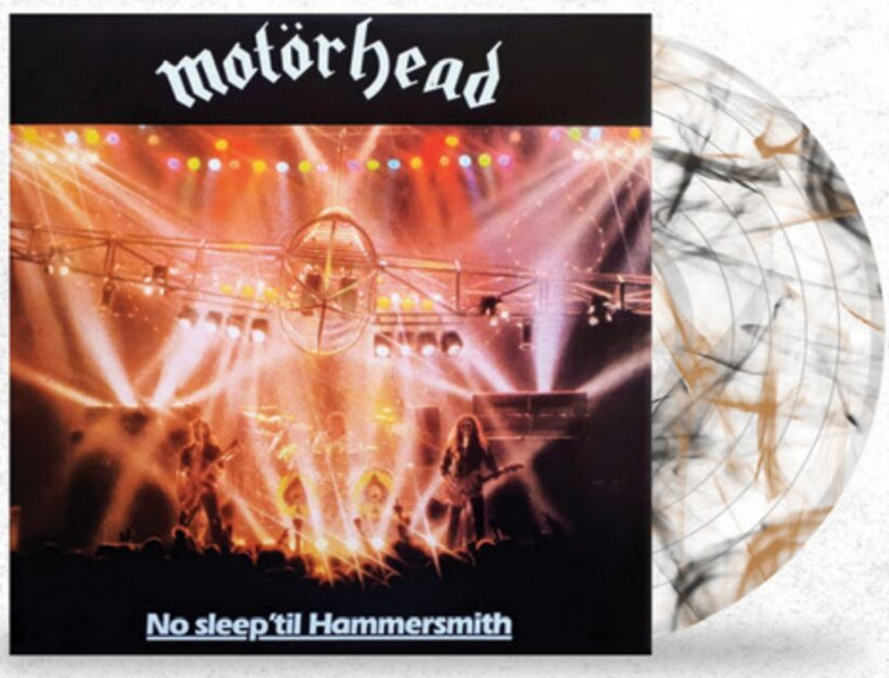

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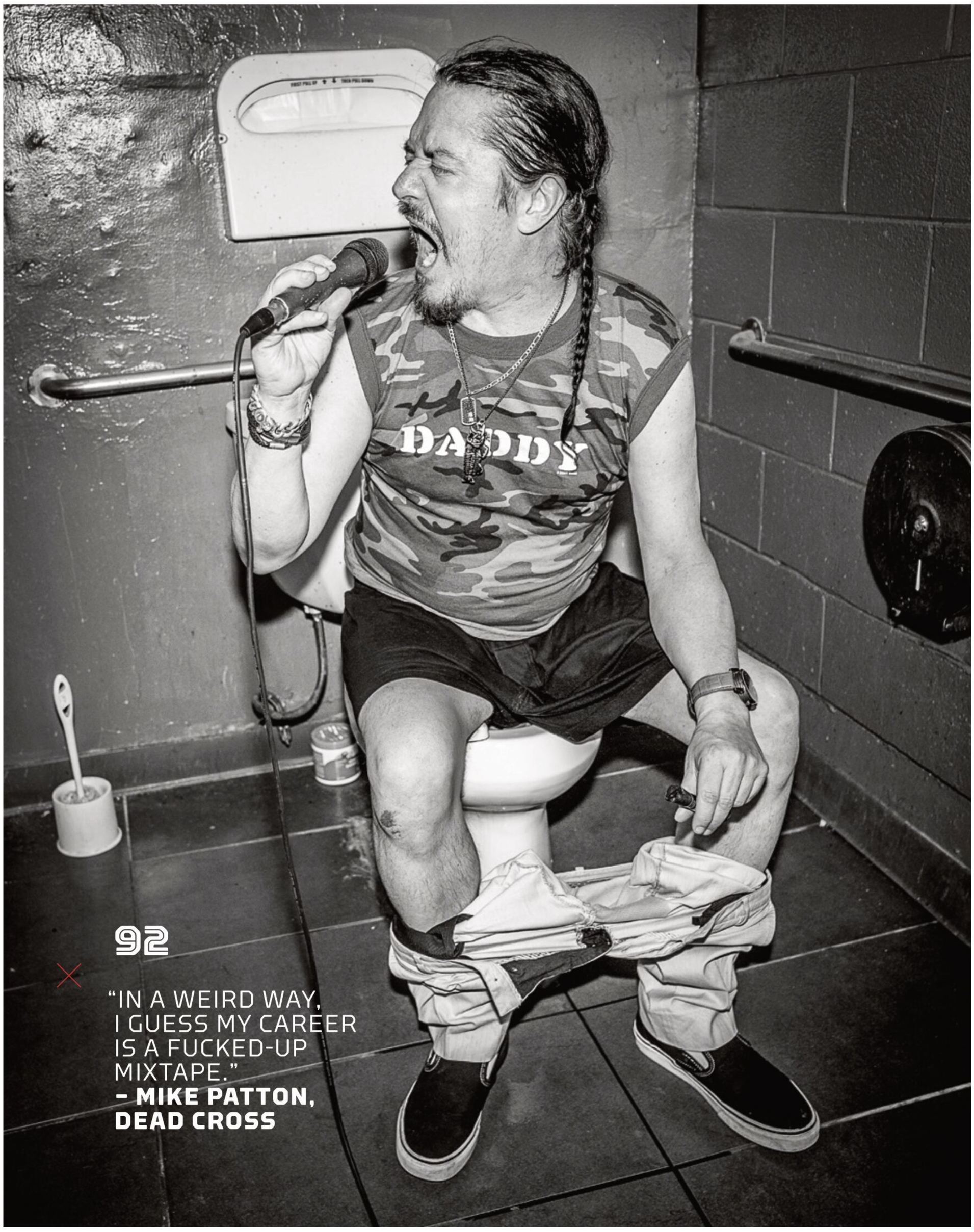

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"IN A WEIRD WAY, I GUESS MY CAREER IS A FUCKED-UP MIXTAPE."
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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

WHEN WE RELAUNCHED *REVOLVER* WAY BACK IN 2017, WE WANTED TO CELEBRATE heavy metal not just as a badass style of music but also a hard-fighting, live-loud, never-say-die attitude. As I wrote in the editor's letter of our relaunch issue: No matter how obsessed it can be with death, metal is ultimately all about life and grabbing it by the fucking horns.

Two of metal's true OGs, Ozzy Osbourne and Dave Mustaine have embodied that attitude throughout their lives and careers — but maybe now even more so than ever. Both were fired from iconic bands — Black Sabbath and Metallica, respectively — and came back swinging, but they'd never faced challenges like they've faced in recent years. Between Megadeth's last album and their triumphant new one, Dave battled throat cancer and won. Ozzy, meanwhile, dealt with so many serious health issues that, for a long time, it looked like he might never play live again. But you can't keep the Prince of Darkness down. In August, he made a surprise appearance at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham to sing "Paranoid" with Tony Iommi — Ozzy's first onstage performance in three years — and looked great doing it.

Love them or hate them, call Ozzy washed up, say Dave is an asshole, but you can't question their toughness. Their perseverance is inspiring. It's also metal as fuck. "That's why I'll keep striving," Ozzy says in our interview. "It keeps you alive."

Keep striving, my friends.

Brandon Geist
Editorial Director/Chief Content Officer

REVOLVER

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UPRISING

ARTISTS YOU NEED TO KNOW NOW

Witch Fever, London, 2022

ADAM TAYLOR

01

Witch Fever, (from left) Annabelle Joyce, Amy Walpole, Alisha Yarwood and Alex Thompson

Witch Fever

Meet the U.K. crew dismantling the patriarchy one raucous doom-punk ripper at a time

BARED TEETH, STIGMATA, KNEELING ON POPCORN KERNELS TO PRAY; BREAKING noses, chewing off heads, oh, and a fuck ton of blood: Welcome to the world of Witch Fever.

A project in exorcising demons and turning trauma into something galvanizing and hot-blooded, the Manchester, England, four-piece — which includes vocalist Amy Walpole, guitarist Alisha Yarwood, bassist Alex Thompson and drummer Annabelle Joyce — split the difference between doom, post-punk, queercore and noise rock to create a blistering wall of sound with just enough hooks to ensnare those not typically tuned into heavy music. Having supported My Chemical Romance and comfortably playing to a crowd of tens of thousands, Witch Fever are aimed for the stratosphere.

Walpole and her band are out to combat a world that has tried to shrink them, and their weapon is sonic violence. On their debut full-length, *Congregation*, Witch Fever take on the ultimate symbol of patriarchal oppression: God. Largely based on Walpole's traumatic experiences growing up in the Charismatic Church (a Christian denomination focused on "the baptism of the Spirit"), the album's evocative anti-hymns reclaim biblical language as an act of power. It's the ultimate act of expulsion.

"Christianity doesn't scare me, the Bible doesn't scare me, but the people who use it to control people scare me," says Walpole. "It was never faith that was an issue. It was organized religion and the way that men used that to control mass groups of people."

Speaking over a Zoom call, Walpole doesn't talk with the veneer of a rock star. She's humble, soft-spoken, transparent. You can tell she has self-respect, total agency over herself, firm boundaries. She's coming into this interview a little hesitant. "Sometimes I come off interviews and feel like I've been in a fucking therapy session," she explains. "People can ask questions that they really, really, really fucking shouldn't."

Walpole is also forthright about resisting the pressure to be a spokesperson for social or political causes; a pressure, she's found, that is specific to people of color and non-binary

TEXT Emma Madden
PHOTOGRAPHY Derek Bremner

Congregation, 2022; *Reincarnate* EP, 2021

and female artists. "There is definitely an expectation on these kinds of artists to educate, be completely transparent and to be a commodity," she says.

Following a smattering of blistering singles and last year's *Reincarnate* EP, which challenged dainty feminine stereotypes, Witch Fever have previously been labeled "feminist figureheads." But Walpole rejects that title. She doesn't want to be your role model — or thought of as perfect. She wants the space to be messy. "It's assumed that if you are women and non-binary in a band you have to be making a statement ... and it can't just be for fun." If anything, Walpole simply wants to be a figurehead for fun. She's been through too much shit to be otherwise.

Walpole grew up in West York, near Bradford and Leeds, a typical mid-Aughts English emo kid. Her favorite bands were — you guessed it — My Chemical Romance, Billy Talent, Paramore, Evanescence. She wore studded belts to school and often donned a trilby hat and waistcoat. ("Fuck," she says, thinking back).

Walpole, it seems, has always possessed a quiet defiance. "I never got in trouble at school," she says, "but I could be kind of gobby if a teacher raised their voice at me. I wasn't having it."

At 13, she joined her church's band and sang before an audience for the first time. She was soon reprimanded for singing too loudly, drawing attention to herself. Walpole eventually left the church at 16. "There were a lot of things that led to me not wanting to be there," she says. Her parents left the fold soon after, "but that's not my story to tell."

I ask how old she was when the doubts began. "Twelve," she says firmly. This doesn't surprise me. It's a number that comes up multiple times in Walpole's lyrics. ("Your blood got on my clothes and now I'm 12 years old," she sang on last year's single "Initiation," while on the new album, there's quite literally a song titled "12.") "Yeah, I do repeat, and I think that it happened by accident," she says. "I feel like I need to say lines several times, and I guess it is like a purge..."

While early pagan religions integrated sexuality into religion via fertility rites, Christianity has tended to exploit and vilify carnality. It's no coincidence that many who become part of a kink community as adults come from religious backgrounds. Today, kink figures plenty in Witch Fever's visuals: leather, spiked collars, as well as themes of finding salvation through pain and servitude. "I think it can make for beautiful imagery ... like, Catholic imagery is so beautiful," says Walpole.

On the roiling album opener "Blessed Be Thy," she bastardizes religious sentiments of retribution and shame, and screams in a biblical cadence, tearing beauty to shreds. "I grew up listening to all these fucking horrible old men preaching at me and using biblical language ... Now it's like, Fuck you, this can be *my* language now ... Men use [those words] to control people, so why wouldn't we take them and use it for our own benefit?"

The Charismatic Church of Walpole's youth didn't exactly share the same opulent aesthetics as Catholicism. "It was disgusting," she says of the dusty, rancid-smelling events center, walls lined with baby-blue colored linoleum, where the churchgoers would congregate. (Walpole references these details on *Congregation's* slow-burning standout "I Saw You Dancing.") "It makes me feel really sick thinking about it," she says, grimacing. "It was so shit."

Walpole finally found a sense of catharsis when she began performing in a slew of metal bands at age 19, before studying at Manchester University, where she wrote a thesis on modern depictions of female possession. She met Thompson, Joyce and Yarwood soon after through mutual friends. Walpole describes herself as the anxious one, the bandmember who needs the most emotional support. "But ... I'm kind of the mom sometimes." Walpole is sober and has been her entire life. "I would see friends doing it growing up, but I was never interested," she says. "Plus, I've had mental health issues my entire life and it's so important for me to keep on top of that." Thompson and Yarwood, she adds, "are little menaces sometimes," who'll go out to party post-show, while Walpole and Joyce will tend to head back to the hotel early.

Playing in a male-dominated scene, Witch Fever experienced sexism from early on. In 2018, a local publication in Bristol (where the band had just played) reported that they were grabbed and jeered at by a particularly rowdy crowd. "I think there wouldn't be a need to have a political agenda if heavy-music scenes weren't just big boys' clubs," she says. "It ended up that I couldn't *not* stand on a stage and talk about it."

Witch Fever's gig supporting My Chemical Romance at Stadium MK in Milton Keynes earlier this spring is by far the band's biggest and bougiest show to date; a far cry from the grim, green room–less venues they'd been used to playing. "When we got offered it, I was like ... fucking amazing, let's go do it," she says. "I walked onto the stage and didn't even feel nervous."

While they didn't get to meet the headliners (there were strict COVID policies in place), Walpole was able to hear Witch Fever's name uttered from singer Gerard Way's lips to a crowd of over 30,000. "I was like, 'What the fuck is my life,'" she recalls of that moment. "It's strange how things like that have just become normal." Walpole is clearly relaxing into her imminent stardom — without compromising on the fire-eating vision that got her here in the first place. ®

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02

Zulu

L.A. crew are opening "new realms" of powerviolence by speaking anti-racist truth and challenging "tough guy" stereotypes

TEXT
Mia Hughes

PHOTOGRAPHY
Steven Ruud

Zulu, performing at SXSW's Not So Fun Wknd, Austin, 2022

THIS PAST SUMMER, RISING LOS ANGELES POWER-violence crew Zulu were about to go play one of their highest-profile shows yet — but they missed the boat. Literally.

In late June, the band was scheduled to appear at the 10th anniversary of Outbreak Fest, the enormous hardcore gathering in Manchester, England, alongside scene leaders Turnstile, Knocked Loose, Scowl and many more. This was Zulu's first trip overseas, so they booked a couple European shows to get warmed up. The Paris gig came off great, but then they missed their ferry from France to the U.K., which kicked off the mad dash to reach Outbreak's stage. After catching a later one and finally making it across the Channel, the band drove the 300 miles from Dover to Manchester and skidded into the venue just in time for their early afternoon slot. Yet they didn't pause for a breath; instead, they jumped onstage and delivered one of the festival's heaviest and most memorable sets.

Zulu blazed through a series of crushing tracks that were over in a flash — all the more potent in these distilled bursts. In between songs, they blasted SZA and Tony! Toni! Toné!; and as he performed, vocalist Anaiah Lei busted out dance moves far different from your average pit two-step. Zulu are a band that knows true heaviness can go hand-in-hand with fun.

"Some of us are headbanging, some of us are grooving and jiving and boogying. That's just how we do," says Lei a month later, back home in L.A. "I don't wanna be something that I'm not. The one thing I wanted to do with my stage presence was never come off as being this tough guy, 'cause that's just not my reality. I'm up there dancing [because] that's what I like to do; it's my favorite thing to do."

The approach of melding joy with potent anger is key to Zulu's identity. That was clear as soon as they began — as Lei's one-man side project while he was drumming in straight-edge crew Dare — and released their first two EPs, 2019's *Our Day Will Come* and 2020's *My People... Hold On*. Musically, urgent powerviolence mingled with soul and R&B samples; and thematically, they were celebrations of Black pride and community as well as outbursts of fury and pain towards a racist society. The records — which were recently re-released on their new label Flatspot Records (home of Scowl, Speed and more) — heralded the band as hardcore's most vital up-and-comers. And, as far as Lei's concerned, Zulu are just getting warmed up.

The now 25-year-old Lei began his fascination with punk and hardcore early. His dad, who had been involved in L.A.'s hardcore scene in the Seventies and Eighties, would tell stories that transfixed Lei as a child. Fights and gang violence were prevalent, he learned, but so was a feeling of community and creativity. He was inspired to form the garage-punk band the Bots with his older brother Mikaiah while he was still in elementary school. By the time Lei reached high school, the duo was playing prominent international festivals (Coachella, Bonnaroo, Reading and Leeds), and garnering press in major outlets including *The Guardian* and *Rolling Stone*.

Lei says he was a confident yet dorky kid, and

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02

"Some of us are headbanging, some of us are grooving and jiving and boogying. That's just how we do. I don't wanna be something that I'm not."
— Anaiah Lei

his unique coming-of-age story was a mixed bag. "I ended up growing up a lot faster than I would have liked to, especially when it came to having to deal with business and stuff," he says. "You don't really get taken seriously when you're a little kid. Which is unfortunate because sometimes kids will actually be onto something..."

Lei joined Dare in 2016 and left the Bots a little later. In 2018, he was asked to fill in on drums for Culture Abuse, and soon became a permanent fixture. Both bands were touring heavily, and the experience was invigorating. He recalls a Culture Abuse show in South Africa as a high point: "People were flipping out. I was like, This is so cool that even this far, here in my motherland, people recognize this band and will sing along to the lyrics."

Yet despite all this success, Lei was itching to start a band that he could front, rather than sitting behind a drum kit. It was an exciting new challenge. "I'd never done lead vocals in my life," he says. "It was so scary. Playing music already is such a vulnerable thing. But getting on the mic is a whole different experience. I don't have something to hide behind." After struggling to find members, Lei decided to form Zulu as a one-man band, though he collaborated with artists such as Jesus Piece's Aaron Heard and Truth Cult's Paris Roberts. His only blueprint was heavy, short-and-sweet songs.

Lyrically, his aim was to voice his experience and feelings directly, with no room for misinterpretation. "In my skin, you won't last," he snarls on "We've Only Just Begun." "What's it gonna take for you to see we're human beings?" he asks on "Do Tha Right Thing (And Stop Frontin')." Lei says that while it was essential to confront these issues head-on, he also won't allow Zulu to be pigeonholed. "Racism and bigotry exist in the scene still," he says. "People will preach all about that stuff yet will go back on their own word. They're just hypocrites. I guess the only thing I can do is just speak on it, but I'm not gonna do that forever. It's exhausting. Those two EPs were just speaking to my truth, but I don't wanna be tokenized."

Lei's truth immediately resonated with fans, a fact that took him by surprise, and the buzz surrounding Zulu only continued to grow throughout the pandemic. It culminated at an L.A. backyard show in summer 2020 that blew the singer's mind. "People [were] flipping out," he recalls. "I saw it online, so that's all I knew ... This was my first time really seeing up close what this band can do." It was suddenly clear that Zulu was more than a side project. Culture Abuse was breaking up around that time, after frontman David Kelling admitted to sexual misconduct. Lei decided to leave Dare, too, to focus wholeheartedly on Zulu. "Zulu is my baby, so I'm gonna choose my baby."

This year, Zulu — who is rounded out by guitarists Dez Yusuf and Braxton Marcellous, bassist Satchel Brown and drummer Christine Cadette — have taken the next step of working on a debut full-length record. During his call with *Revolver,* Lei is vague on specifics but palpably excited. "There are going to be entirely new realms explored musically," he says. "I didn't want it to be typical. I didn't wanna do just any record. I didn't get to even include everything I wanted to, but I got to include a lot of elements. It was tough, a lot of work. ... [But] getting to experiment with all the things I wanted to was an amazing experience."

Lei aspires to a future where Zulu are entirely unrestricted, and where they'll be surprising audience members from ever-bigger stages. (A future they glimpsed this summer at Roskilde Festival, where they played on a diverse bill supporting Tyler, the Creator, Jerry Cantrell, Mitski and more.) "We're gonna do it truly the way we wanna do it, and not be bounded by any barrier — and especially any stereotype, that's for darn sure," says Lei. "We see no limit. We're ever-changing, and that's the best part about it. ... The future for this band and what it looks like — in the best way possible — is so unclear. And it's beautiful."

My People... Hold On EP, 2020; *Our Day Will Come* EP, 2019

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03

(right) Inclination's Tyler Short; (opposite page) Short and Isaac Hale

Inclination

Knocked Loose side project hit a wall with "superhero straight edge." They broke through by embracing their own flawed humanity.

TEXT Mia Hughes
PHOTOGRAPHY Gabe Becerra

"IF YOU WANT LOUISVILLE TO THRIVE, YOU HAVE TO put work in. I tell people: Your shows, your venues, your bands might be cooler, but we like hardcore more than you. We just do."

That's Isaac Hale, and he knows a thing or two about building a buzzing hardcore community. As guitarist for Knocked Loose, he's helped propel his Kentucky band from grassroots heroes to widely celebrated heavyweights leading the way in modern hardcore. And if he wasn't busy enough with that (or his production duties for SeeYouSpaceCowboy, Wristmeetrazor and more), Hale is also putting in work with his side project Inclination — the emerging straight-edge metallic hardcore outfit he formed with fellow Kentuckian Tyler Short.

Inclination have released two ripping, cred-building EPs, 2017's *Midwest Straight Edge* and 2019's *When Fear Turns to Confidence*, that, as Hale jokes, could be described as "superhero straight edge" — because vocalist Short presented himself as indestructible and incorruptible thanks to his clean-living ideals. But on their new debut full-length, *Unaltered Perspective,* things get more complex. Short takes off the mask.

"The best part of the superhero movie is when the superhero's human," he says. "And that was what I wanted to do with this record — just be human."

Set to unrelenting metalcore, his lyrics about loss, abandonment, healing and rage are vulnerable and candid. It's an album that explores, beyond finger-pointing, the true ramifications of living in a society torn by addiction — a powerful musical statement that has Inclination poised for their own breakout moment.

Growing up, the now 34-year-old Short was a skinny, skateboarding misfit who discovered punk rock through skate videos. When kids around him started smoking weed, he wasn't interested. "The kids who did it stopped skating," he recalls. "All I wanted to do was skateboard, get all scraped up and bloody, and then do it again."

Around 2013, Short attended one of Knocked Loose's

Unaltered Perspective, 2022; *When Fear Turns to Confidence* EP, 2019; *Midwest Straight Edge* EP, 2017

earliest shows, which is where he first witnessed a then 16-year-old Hale playing guitar. Short was nine years his elder, but immediately respected Hale for both his musical skills and devotion to the Louisville scene (the kid was a front-row fixture at nearly every show). The pair bonded over their love for hardcore, and commitment to turn the small, struggling scene into a thriving one. Before Hale's touring responsibilities with Knocked Loose became too heavy, the musician recorded a demo for almost every local band that wanted one. Short, meanwhile, formed LDB Records in 2016 to work with small groups who would otherwise never be pressed to vinyl.

Inclination grew out of their friendship in 2017, and — much like the Louisville scene itself — the band has been evolving ever since. A big jump in that evolution occurred in 2020 when Inclination, which is completed by bassist Caleb Murphy, guitarist Peter Katter and drummer Christopher Mills, began writing *Unaltered Perspective*. After those two initial EPs, Short felt like he didn't have much more to say about simply being straight edge. But as he investigated the roots of his beliefs, he found that it led to much wider conversations.

"It's not just the culture; it's the corporations," he says. "There's a monetary influence to why we're prescribed these pills, because people want us to be docile. It was important to me to have a bigger conversation about what it means to be a part of this world [and] not to turn away from the truth."

Short's new truth-seeking approach manifested on "Epidemic," which addresses a broken healthcare system (with help from Indecision singer Tom Sheehan), "Thoughts and Prayers," which spits fury at politicians ignoring the opioid crisis, and "A Decision," which reflects on the choice to become straight edge (and includes vocal assists from One Step Closer's Ryan Savitski and Magnitude's Russ Bussey). Short's politics were informed, in part, by working at the same corporate grocery store since he was 16 and seeing starvation wages and exploitation up close. Musically, he was inspired by the storytelling of folk songwriters including Bob Dylan and Steve Earle.

There were deeply personal factors at play in Short's lyricism, too. As he was writing, his childhood best friend died of a drug overdose. "The Christmas when I was 12 … I received my first skateboard [and] my friend Ian down the street received his first skateboard," he recalls. "We were skating in the only dry patch of concrete … 'cause it had snowed, just trying to ollie. That [memory] is burned in my brain… And now he's gone." Short began writing "Predetermined" on the way home from the funeral, a moment crystalized in the song's piercing line: "An unavoidable end for my first best friend."

He digs deeper into his own self on "Marooned" and "Connections," which address mental health issues. Short has been in therapy for the last few years, a process that led him to the realizations expressed on "Commitment to Self." "[The] commitment [is] to try to be better, more insightful, more appreciative," he says, "to be wide-eyed to the world, to yourself and all of your problems and shortcomings, and to try to be more mindful to not walk the same roads again."

It's a sentiment that's brought Inclination, as a whole, to an entirely new level, Hale attests. "Tyler's lyric game and vocal performance on this one is by miles the best thing that he's ever done. … This record turned out to be way darker, way more serious [and] better than I ever could have imagined."

And though he's the first to admit he's no superhero, Short ultimately owes the progress he has made, and the vulnerability he was able to unlock on this album, to straight edge. "I haven't tried to disconnect from reality," he says. "I've looked into the abyss, and it's looking back at me. I'm in a staring contest with the abyss now. And I'm unwilling to look away until it gets better."

04

Holy Fawn

Arizona post-metal outfit makes peace with death while exploring a multiverse of "loud, heavy, pretty noises"

TEXT Gregory Adams
PHOTOGRAPHY Charles Barth

THE MULTIVERSE IS HAVING A MOMENT – AN INFIN-itude of them, if you will. Thanks to Marvel's recent batch of mind-warping blockbusters, parallel realities have fully entered the zeitgeist. But the concept is nothing new to Holy Fawn's Ryan Osterman. The guitarist-vocalist has been captivated by the boundless planes of existence since before he even lost his baby teeth.

Osterman's fascination can be traced back to age four, when he watched a Discovery Channel documentary that introduced him to the concept of death, via a poisonous fish that puts prospective predators into fatal, anaphylactic shock. When the young boy grilled his father on what that meant, exactly, the answer ripped apart his notion of reality.

Holy Fawn, (from left) Evan Phelps, Austin Reinholz, Alexander Rieth and Ryan Osterman

"'Well, you basically go to sleep and never wake up,'" Osterman recalls his father telling him. "I remember freaking out, running to the bathroom and crying, and my dad was just like, 'It's OK! I'm going to die; your mom's going to die; you're going to die; everyone's going to die!' It… shook me up a little bit." He laughs.

At 33, Osterman's interest in those varying planes now manifests throughout his Arizona outfit's latest full-length, *Dimensional Bleed*. From a sonic standpoint, you could look at how the quartet ambitiously phases between the abrasive contours of metal towards a turquoise glow of Sigur Rós-leaning post-rock, a genre-stumping feat that has made a fan out of Lamb of God's Randy Blythe and earned them spots opening for Deafheaven and Thrice.

Per the lyrics of *Dimensional Bleed*'s "Void of Light," Osterman continues to contemplate what happens once you've entered a state of "eternal sleep." The album also explores simultaneously existing timelines, as well as the differences in perception between nightmares and the waking mind. Osterman confesses to being an indecisive person, but when you consider how each of life's decisions has the potential to place you on an infinite number of different paths, you can hardly blame him.

"I think about my own life," he continues, "What if I made [a] different choice at whatever point in my life — where would I be at this age, in that different timeline? Would it intersect again with this? It's such an abstract concept, but it's something that resonates with me."

Luckily, working with Holy Fawn has Osterman less panicked about the unknown than his younger self. These days, he's attempting to make sense of the intangible through meticulously crafted, heavily melodic and gorgeously distortion-laced songs. Take *Dimensional Bleed*'s first slow-boiling single, "Death Is a Relief," wherein the musician pontificates on transitional states, and the "struggle of existing when it felt so much better to let go."

"Lyrically, the song is depressing as fuck, obviously,"

Dimensional Bleed, 2022; *The Black Moon* EP, 2020; *Death Spells*, 2018; *Realms* EP, 2015

Osterman says of the tune, later adding of Holy Fawn's broader exploration of death: "We don't really know a lot about it. We treat it so macabre [while] we treat birth with this profound amazement, like how it's this glorious miracle. I feel like death should be treated the same way. It could be [interpreted as] anything from rebirth, [to a] transcendence into something even better."

Holy Fawn, themselves — Osterman, guitarist Evan Phelps, bassist-vocalist Alexander Rieth and drummer-vocalist Austin Reinholz — have progressively leveled up since forming in Tempe in 2015. While they'd all grown up performing in various groups within the Arizona underground music scene, Osterman, Phelps and Rieth came together while working at a local guitar shop.

They loathed their shared retail experience, but connected over a love of post-rock, shoegaze and metal. When the trio set up a jam session along with Rieth's drummer roommate, the initial meeting morphed into a euphoric, six-hour practice. Stricken by the connection, they opted to lock in as Holy Fawn, and delivered the six-song *Realms* EP that same year. By 2018, their debut album, *Death Spells*, gained wide acclaim over its passionate post-metal crescendos, as well Osterman's swirl of ethereal whispers and punctured-lung shrieks. They later worked with engineer-producer Matt Bayles (Mastodon, Botch) for 2020's follow-up EP, *The Black Moon*.

Through it all, Holy Fawn have tried to eschew traditional genre tags in favor of a bluntly evocative aesthetic slogan: Loud Heavy Pretty Noises. "We could be like, 'Oh, it's ambient, doomgaze post-rock, with some indie,' [but] you lose someone after the first couple of [genres]," Osterman explains. "Loud Heavy Pretty Noises... that's perfect! That's all you need to hear."

In the past, the guitarist-vocalist had plotted out Holy Fawn tunes on an acoustic guitar before adapting them into a full-band crush. With *Dimensional Bleed*, the quartet's chief songwriter charted off into unknown territory by beginning with a series of ambient electronic washes — those impressionistic, synthesized undulations heard bubbling beneath melancholy guitar explosions like "Empty Vials." The electronic bedrock also entwines with Osterman's penchant for fertile, organic lyricism, whether detailing constrictive vines ("Blood Memory") or bodies being reabsorbed into a mossy meadow ("Void of Light").

Despite such lush backdrops, Osterman grew up on the outskirts of Phoenix, and often spent nights wandering into the arid wilderness with his brother. A golf course was somewhat nearby, but his home was miles removed from a gas station or grocery store.

"I was at the very end of the road," he recalls. "You'd walk 10-15 minutes [further] and see all these wooden little dead-end barricades; [from there] it was just mountainous desert. There are rattlesnakes and javelinas. When I was in high school, I'd be driving down the road and you'd pump the breaks because there's a coyote just standing in the road. At night, you'd hear the wind and the wildlife."

"It's sadly not that way anymore," he continues. "I think the last time I was there they had expanded and built a freeway through a mountain. It's kind of depressing to see what it became."

Over the years, natural landscapes have shifted around Osterman, while Holy Fawn's songwriting process has likewise progressed. One thing that has stuck with him, though, is his interest in the afterlife. Death permeates *Dimensional Bleed*, and, sadly, it's also been a recurring theme throughout Osterman personal life. The musician explains that there have been multiple suicides in his family, and he also notes that a close friend and early musical collaborator suffered a fatal overdose in their freshman year of high school.

"I've been surrounded by death for a ton of my life," Osterman reveals. "I hate saying that, because I feel like everyone has and it doesn't make my experience any more potent than anyone else's. I don't know if it's a coping mechanism, but [death] is very important in my life. It's something that I think about and write about."

While still full of unknowns, art has helped Osterman sit with the concept of death. At a young age, his mother introduced him to the darker, mortality-contemplating poetry of Edgar Allan Poe, and his current lyrical meditations within Holy Fawn have grappled with similar themes. Though Osterman concedes that none of *Dimensional Bleed*'s musings on death speak to any specific situation, he acknowledges there is still comfort to be drawn as he wonders what happens when we cross over the threshold to the hereafter. Absolutes are nevertheless hard to pin down, but at its most optimistic, "Hexsewn" and "Blood Memory" bookend *Dimensional Bleed* with a softly sung hope for what's to come: "I'll find you again in some other life." Ⓡ

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Mindforce

How Jay Peta went from upstate New York hard case to school-teaching family man leading one of hardcore's most vibrant acts

TEXT Eli Enis

MINDFORCE FRONTMAN JAY PETA'S LIFE HAS PLAYED out like the plot of some gnarly coming-of-age film: Upstate New York high school soccer star turned hardcore devotee descends into drug-slinging hell before finding redemption in family and a new life teaching public school by day — and fronting one of the most vibrant hardcore acts in the game at night.

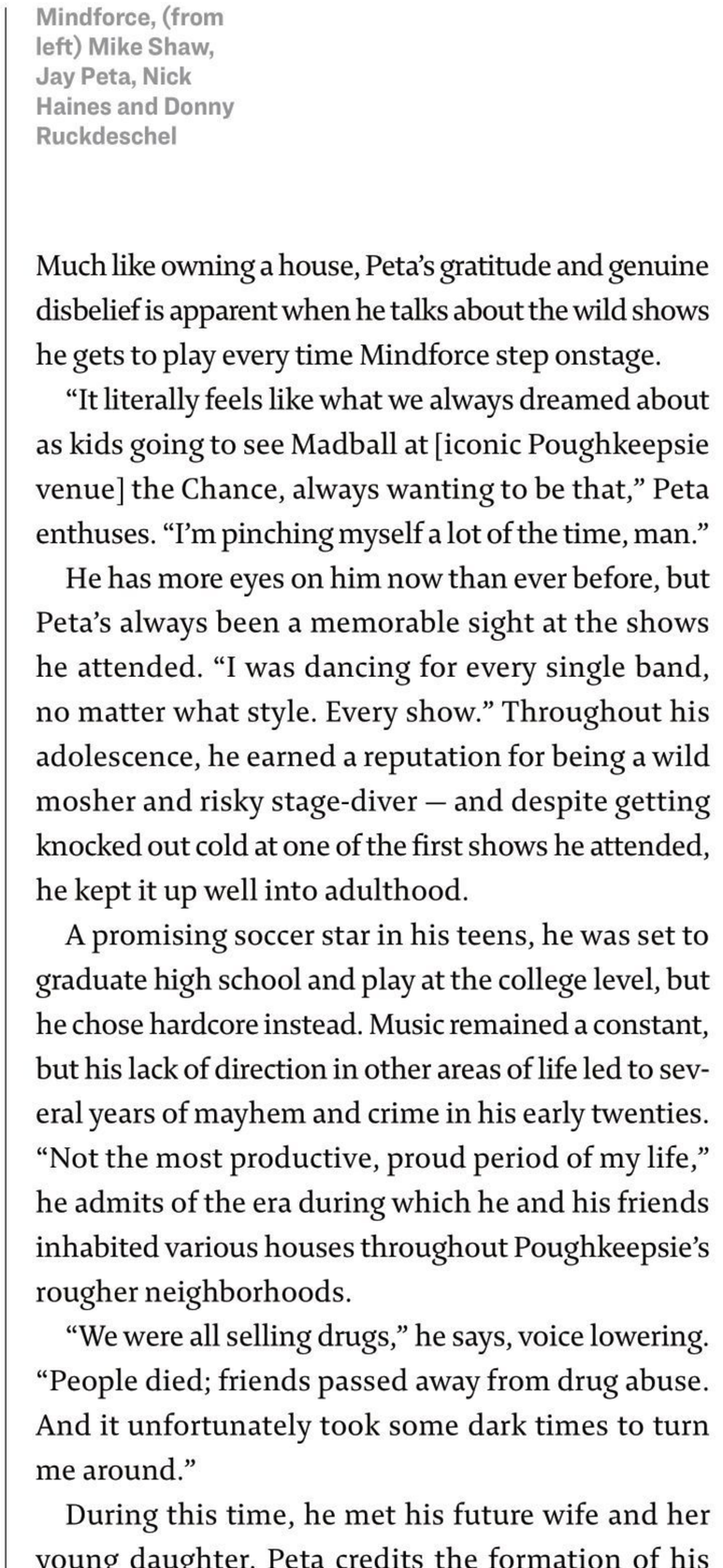
"Bro, I *never* thought I would own a house," the 42-year-old Peta tells *Revolver* of his unexpected trajectory. "I've lived next to boilers under stairs in basements in Poughkeepsie."

Peta's story is an inspiring, incredible one — and hardcore has played a starring role in it from the beginning. When he was just a bright-eyed teenage athlete, an older friend told him about these things called hardcore shows that featured "the scariest, craziest, most frightening, violent, fun music in the world." From that moment on he was hooked.

"It became my religion," Peta says of his devotion to hardcore while growing up in New York's Hudson Valley, the region where he still calls home. "To this day, when I make decisions in life, lyrics ring in my head of silly hardcore songs that I love."

Now, there's a whole new generation of zealots using hardcore as their north star — and it's Peta's lyrics guiding them through life's tribulations. Mindforce are presently a headlining act in the genre, commanding blowout crowds at fests like Sound and Fury and FYA, touring with Terror and continuing their rise to dominance with their sophomore album, *New Lords*. Renowned for their live showmanship and air-tight playing, Mindforce's clever breed of metallic hardcore strikes a fresh balance between myriad heavy, thrashy and bouncy New York styles — like if Leeway were influenced by Merauder instead of the other way around.

The band are deservedly thriving. But for Peta, it took a *long* time to get here. For 20 years, he grinded in outfits that never broke outside of upstate New York. In 2016, Mindforce emerged as another humble beginning for the hardcore lifer, but this band shockingly took off.



Mindforce, (from left) Mike Shaw, Jay Peta, Nick Haines and Donny Ruckdeschel

Much like owning a house, Peta's gratitude and genuine disbelief is apparent when he talks about the wild shows he gets to play every time Mindforce step onstage.

"It literally feels like what we always dreamed about as kids going to see Madball at [iconic Poughkeepsie venue] the Chance, always wanting to be that," Peta enthuses. "I'm pinching myself a lot of the time, man."

He has more eyes on him now than ever before, but Peta's always been a memorable sight at the shows he attended. "I was dancing for every single band, no matter what style. Every show." Throughout his adolescence, he earned a reputation for being a wild mosher and risky stage-diver — and despite getting knocked out cold at one of the first shows he attended, he kept it up well into adulthood.

A promising soccer star in his teens, he was set to graduate high school and play at the college level, but he chose hardcore instead. Music remained a constant, but his lack of direction in other areas of life led to several years of mayhem and crime in his early twenties. "Not the most productive, proud period of my life," he admits of the era during which he and his friends inhabited various houses throughout Poughkeepsie's rougher neighborhoods.

"We were all selling drugs," he says, voice lowering. "People died; friends passed away from drug abuse. And it unfortunately took some dark times to turn me around."

During this time, he met his future wife and her young daughter. Peta credits the formation of his happy family with pulling him out of a dangerous downward spiral. "She's the key to my success. If it wasn't for her, I don't know where the hell I would be in life." In a noble rejection of his seedy past, Peta decided to follow in his father's footsteps and become a teacher, a job he still performs today at an inner-city public school in Poughkeepsie. For Peta, his passions for inspiring a classroom of students and a sweaty crowd of hardcore fans coexist perfectly. "I haven't *not* had a band since I was 16. I don't know any other way."

After his early 2010s band Living Laser fizzled out, Peta and guitarist Mike Shaw decided they wanted to form a new group that was heavier, drawing from their love of Nineties metallic hardcore — specifically the local bands they came up seeing like All Out War and Dissolve. This new band — which they dubbed Mindforce — began with no expectations to be heard by anyone outside of their friend group. But they instantly connected with fans in the live setting and their early EPs took off nationally — their popularity

COURTESY OF MINDFORCE

SPORTSMEN RESPECT WILDLIFE
POLO RALPH LAUREN & CO.
AGE OF APOCALYPSE

05

New Lords, 2022; *Swingin Swords, Choppin Lords* EP, 2020; *Excalibur*, 2018

exploding when Triple B Records released their superb 2018 debut album, *Excalibur*.

"It blew my mind," Peta says of the response that positioned them as one of hardcore's hottest new groups. "I've had whole life spans of bands where only 10 people give a fuck."

Right now, the ability to live out their wildest fantasies feels acutely special — because on two separate occasions, Mindforce's dreams briefly turned to nightmares. In the lead-up to *Excalibur*, his hard life of moshing finally caught up with him when a friend stage-dove off a monitor and landed on Peta's back. The vocalist had already racked up his fair share of broken bones and injuries — including getting thrown through a window, which nearly sliced his arm off — but this pain was different.

"That was bad, man," he soberly recalls. "I couldn't really walk for a couple months. I couldn't do anything. I went to a really dark mental place, and it was a yearlong recovery."

Many of *Excalibur*'s lyrics are about Peta overcoming that injury and being able to return to the stage, swinging arms and jumping giddily in his signature energetic style. ("I'm back stronger than ever, bro," he gushes of his current form.) Just when Mindforce got back into fighting shape, the band suffered another devastating blow when Shaw was involved in a near-fatal head-on car collision that resulted in broken ribs and serious fractures in his left leg.

"We thought Mindforce was done," Peta recalls of when the doctors said Shaw may never walk or play guitar again. "And this fucking maniac came back like an animal." Mindforce miraculously returned to the stage just six months later and continued full steam ahead: playing bigger and better shows up until the pandemic, and then dropping the excellent *Swingin Swords, Choppin Lords* EP in 2020.

Ironically, while the band would've been devastated to suffer a tragic end, Mindforce never actually intended to stick around long enough to release a second album. "I can't believe we wrote another LP," Peta says of *New Lords* with a laugh. Even after the love they got from *Excalibur*, he says that their plan since the beginning was to make one album, drop a few seven-inches and singles and then fade away — preserving their spotless catalog and going out on top like many of the greatest hardcore bands before them.

But their perspective changed after the pandemic arrived and ripped live shows away from them at the peak of their powers. Peta and Co. had a revelation about not taking anything for granted, and decided they had one more full-length in them.

"The only word that comes to mind is gratitude," Peta says of the band's continued success and where he's at in life. "I'm somebody who believes in karma. And I had a lot of bad karma for a while. I'm trying to build it up good, and I think maybe that helped Mindforce out." Ⓡ

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ROSS HALFIN

OZZY

The Prince of Darkness reflects on five decades of hell-raising, reuniting with Tony Iommi and why he's saying "fuck that" to retirement

TEXT
Steve Appleford

PHOTOGRAPHY
Ross Halfin

THE PRINCE OF DARKNESS HAS ARRIVED TO ANOTHER STANDING OVATION. WITH a jeweled cross hanging over his chest, fingernails painted black, Ozzy Osbourne leans on a cane as he's guided into a Hollywood sound studio, just weeks after surgery on his neck. When he slowly turns to face a crowd of admirers — each masked and wearing an Ozzy or Black Sabbath T-shirt — the heavy-metal icon looks pleased, flashing a shiny movie-star grin.

"Hello, how are you doing?" Osbourne says, dressed in Gothic shades of black, his immediately recognizable, accented mumble echoing from his adolescence in Birmingham, England.

At 73, Ozzy is anxious to return to action after a long season of health ups and downs: from COVID-19 and pneumonia to Parkinson's disease and a painful fall at home, plus the lingering effects of a 2003 ATV accident that the recent surgery was meant to correct. At the same time, and despite these challenges, this wild-eyed singer is experiencing continued creative rebirth with the release of his 13th album, *Patient Number 9*, his second in an ongoing collaboration with producer-guitarist Andrew Watt.

Joining Osbourne on a small stage in this studio are Watt and guitarist (and Ozzy lifer) Zakk Wylde, the latter in leather vest and Viking beard, ready to talk about the new album for a SiriusXM taping. The singer sits with his usual nervous energy, shifting from one side of his chair to the other, dropping his cane to the floor, answering questions from this crowd of invited SiriusXM subscribers and interviewer Billy Morrison.

"I've had some great times over the last 55 years and I ain't done yet," says Ozzy, whose legendary career is filled with countless exalted, infamous and iconic moments, not the least of which was his 2006 induction into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame as a member of metal originators Black Sabbath. "When you've been around as long as I have — the word 'retirement,' *fuck that*."

His first collaboration with Watt, now 31, was in 2019 on the unlikely Top 10 single featuring Post Malone and Travis Scott, "Take What You Want." Watt and Osbourne quickly followed that with 2020's *Ordinary Man*, the singer's first solo release in nearly a decade and his most acclaimed in years, reaching the Top 5 in the U.S. and across much of Europe. That album featured several high-profile guests, including Slash, Tom Morello and (on piano and backing vocals) Elton John. *Patient Number 9* continues that same collaborative spirit. But while *Ordinary Man* relied on traditional song structures for most tracks, this time Osbourne and Watt decided to stretch out and make room for a multi-generational all-star cast of guitar heroes, including Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck, Pearl Jam's Mike McCready, Queens of the Stone Age's Josh Homme, and Wylde (who also plays some keyboard).

The new album also marks the first appearance on an Ozzy solo release by his Black Sabbath co-founder and guitarist Tony Iommi, riffing and soloing on two extremely heavy tunes, "Degradation Rules" and "No Escape From Now."

Ozzy is determined to push this album into the spotlight, and, despite any physical discomfort following his surgery, he's working hard to promote its release. A week earlier, he was at Comic-Con in San Diego signing autographs with Todd McFarlane — the artist who directed the "Patient Number 9" video, created the limited-edition comic book that accompanies the album and designed the 25-foot-tall Ozzy inflatable that stood guard outside the venue. In another week, he'll be back onstage in Birmingham, reunited again with Iommi to perform Sabbath's classic "Paranoid" (and a bit of "Iron Man") at their hometown's Commonwealth Games.

During the SiriusXM interview, each *Patient Number 9* track is played for the audience as Watt, in short bleached hair, leather jacket and vintage Ozzy shirt, leans toward the singer while playing along on air guitar. "The process of making this album was the most fun. How could you not have fun sitting with Ozzy?" Watt tells the audience. "Every other thing out of his mouth makes you shit your pants in laughter."

OZZY OSBOURNE ISN'T A FAN OF COMMUNICATING OVER THE COMPUTER, BUT with his recent surgery and a new bump in cases of COVID-19, he's doing most interviews about *Patient Number 9* via Zoom. As he signs on, he's wearing a black T-shirt with "L.A." in large letters. Leaning against the wall behind him is a black-and-white portrait of a grinning Ozzy in dark shades.

"After I finish with you, my physical trainer comes down," Ozzy says, angling toward his computer screen. "I'm going to work out and keep doing that and get back on my feet. I'm a lot better than I was, but I've still got a ways to go. Then I'm going out on the fucking road and never coming back home again. I've gotta get back on that fucking stage, man."

This Zoom call is from a Los Angeles apartment. The big family home where Ozzy became a famously high-strung reality TV dad on MTV's *The Osbournes* is long gone, as are other L.A. homes that followed. The kids are grown up and having babies of their own. (Daughter Kelly Osbourne, 37, is currently pregnant with her first child with Slipknot's Sid Wilson.) Ozzy and his wife (and manager) Sharon are returning to England with their 11 little dogs. They have sold their house and are keeping a humble apartment in California. They're moving for tax reasons, and plan to spend half the year in England, half in the U.S., says Ozzy. Not that he's happy about it.

"I'm more of an American now. I love this country," he says, and predicts that back in the U.K. he'll "go fucking insane, bored shitless."

The move will bring him physically closer to Iommi. Whether Ozzy and Iommi will ever work together again, the singer can't predict, but he's pleased with their reunion on his new album. The song "No Escape From Now" began as a piece of music mingling acoustic and electric guitar riffs that Iommi sent to Ozzy and Watt to be completed. The other tune, "Degradation Rules," started in L.A. and left room for a wild Iommi solo. The playing is Iommi at his most relentless and crazed, like a time warp to classic early Sabbath, accented with Ozzy on searing harmonica.

"Tony, God bless him, he comes to my rescue," says Osbourne. "And in actual fact, since we've made up, he's been really supportive. Calls me regularly to see how I'm doing.

"If it wasn't for Tony Iommi, there never would have been a Black Sabbath. We've had arguments, we've fallen out, we've made up. It's just like a marriage. You get divorced, you get back together. But Tony Iommi — and I can never deny this — there's not a man on the face of the earth who comes up with these gutty, dark, heavy riffs. He's the king of riffs."

They text regularly, Ozzy says, and he still speaks often with original Sabbath drummer Bill Ward, though he seems to have lost touch with bassist Geezer Butler. ("The only person that I don't speak to — I don't know where he is — is Geezer," Ozzy noted at SiriusXM. "He just disappears.") Since Osbourne has been dealing with health issues these last few years, a handful of others have made a point of checking

Tony Iommi and Osbourne performing during the Commonwealth Games Closing Ceremony, Alexander Stadium, Birmingham, England, 2022

EDDIE KEOGH/GETTY IMAGES

in, offering to help in any way, notably including Slash and Korn's Jonathan Davis.

"It's amazing when you get sick, how many people don't call anymore," Ozzy says wistfully. "Slash is a gentleman. He's such a nice man … If I was to phone Slash now and he was in town, whatever I wanted, he'd be around."

The first public glimpse that suggested the scope of the new album was its title track and first single, "Patient Number 9," as Osbourne rages about the special horror of a hospital stay: "Every hallway's painted white as the light/That will guide you to your hell."

The song is about being in a mental hospital, he explains, and he refers to *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* — but also draws from personal experiences. It begins with Ozzy's lunatic ramblings over an instrumental intro. "I've been in mental hospitals, I've been in rehab," he adds. "I've been in every fucking hospital. It's not a very nice place to be."

The single is one of two appearances by Jeff Beck. His complex, aggressive soloing on the title track is an earworm Ozzy can't shake, he says. "I walk around with it in my head all the time."

The presence of Beck and Clapton makes *Patient Number 9* an unexpected marker in the story of the Yardbirds, the hugely influential British rock act and home to consecutive guitar virtuosos — Clapton, Beck, Jimmy Page — in the 1960s. Led Zeppelin grew directly out of the Yardbirds when Page was the only one left standing. (Ozzy had hoped Page would also contribute to the new album, but he never heard back from the guitarist.) The band was a half-generation ahead of Osbourne and Iommi by the time Sabbath's first album landed in 1970 and created an entirely new path called heavy metal. The demonic rolling thunder of *Black Sabbath* owed something to what came before in British rock, from the Kinks' "You Really Got Me" to Deep Purple and the guitar eruptions of the Yardbirds and Cream.

"When you play with someone like Jeff Beck and Eric Clapton, these people are fucking masters of their craft," says Osbourne now. "Clapton just amazes me." The collisions of genres and generations on *Patient Number 9* would have been unheard of in Ozzy's first decade as an exploding madman solo artist, enjoying platinum sales while leading an Eighties metal movement entirely separate from mainstream rock.

Ozzy was also once convinced Clapton thought he was "a fucking joke." Back in 1989, Ozzy and art-pop diva Grace Jones presented Clapton with a trophy at the International Rock Awards in New York City. Afterwards, the trio posed together for pictures backstage, and the photographer kept pushing Oz to grin and bug-out for the camera. He was already notorious. He was the singer of "Crazy Train" that somehow cheated death through extreme drink and drugs, snorted ants for a laugh and bit off the head of a bat onstage. The photographer wanted to see some of that — to watch Ozzy bark at the moon right next to an otherworldly, barely clothed Jones and a bemused Clapton.

Osbourne, Grace Jones and Eric Clapton, International Rock Awards, New York City, 1989; (right) Osbourne recreating the *Blizzard of Ozz* cover, 1981; (opposite page) Osbourne and Randy Rhoads, 1982

"That's all people think I can do, so I do the pose that he wants, and I'm pissed off," Osbourne recalls of that night, imagining that he looked ridiculous to the classic-rock god. Ozzy says, "I was just coming off the dope and scared of everybody." He was also certain that Clapton made sure their photograph together was never released. "I made a fool of myself. For 10 years, I'm going, 'He thinks I'm a cunt.'"

Then, years later, Osbourne was at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting in L.A.'s San Fernando Valley and he spotted Clapton sitting in the back. "I go, 'Oh fuck, he's gonna say something to me.' It's all in my head. So at the end of the meeting, I bolted, get in the car and fucked off."

A couple of weeks later, Ozzy returned to the same A.A. meeting place, and Clapton was there again. Ozzy bolted again. But soon after, the singer happened to pick up a magazine and saw the photo he thought Clapton suppressed — and noticed the guitarist was all smiles in the shot. "It was only my own drug-fueled paranoia that got me thinking like that," Ozzy says now.

Still, when Watt suggested reaching out to Clapton to appear on his new album, Ozzy's initial reaction was: "No, fuck, you're pushing it!" Watt reached out anyway.

"[Clapton] said yeah, and I was like *fuckin' hell*. I thought he was going to go, 'Fuck this!' But sometimes people say yes," Ozzy says. "My reputation precedes me because they think I'm a fucking lunatic, but I was for many years."

The Clapton performance on *Patient Number 9* is "One of Those Days," and it eventually shifts from liquid blues into a crying guitar voice that echoes Clapton's signature sound in his late-Sixties power trio Cream. Watt had been lobbying for that from the Slowhand in repeated emails, and eventually sent a wah-wah pedal to Clapton's studio to make sure. It was one of the last songs completed for the album.

Before that could happen, Clapton needed Ozzy to address some concerns he had with the song's repeated lyric: "Killing myself but I never die/It's one of those days that I don't believe in Jesus." Osbourne explained the song was about having an especially bad day and losing faith in everything, frustrated that "everything's fucked in my life." The singer and Watt attempted to replace the line, but found it difficult to recreate the original's snarling feeling.

"When you capture something on record, sometimes you can't reproduce it the same. You get the same notes, but not the vibe, the feeling of what you captured," says Osbourne. He told Clapton the lyric would have to remain. "I said, 'If you don't want to play, I'll get it.' And then he went, 'OK, I'll play on it,' which is great. The guitar is fucking phenomenal."

On "Immortal," McCready tracked his solo just days after the death of Eddie Van Halen on October 6th, 2020, and captured some of the late guitarist's fiery spirit, yanking his whammy bar over the song's driving Zeppelin-esque rhythm as Osbourne sings of the living and undead. "I come alive at the second of midnight," he begins his vampire tale, "so I can fly when the world is asleep."

Osbourne has his own Van Halen memories. In 1978, the young Southern California band was opening for Black Sabbath on the European leg of their *Never Say Die!* tour, not long before Ozzy was pushed out and forced into a successful solo career. "[Eddie] was such a great guy. They came to our local pub and it was good fun," recalls Osbourne.

"But David Lee Roth, he's lost a couple of nuts and bolts. When you meet him,

LEFT: DAVE HOGAN/GETTY IMAGES; RIGHT: IN COSTELLO/REDFERNS; OPPOSITE PAGE: PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

Osbourne and Zakk Wylde, 1989

it's like, 'What's wrong with him?' He's like somewhere else, you know?"

Van Halen was part of a new breed of flash guitarist that included another force of nature in the form of Randy Rhoads, who was an essential ingredient in establishing Osbourne at the beginning of the Eighties with *Blizzard of Ozz* and *Diary of a Madman*. Like Van Halen, Rhoads followed the cosmic, seemingly limitless example of Jimi Hendrix on the instrument, but with new sounds and techniques.

"They were arch enemies," Ozzy remembers. "Randy didn't have a lot to say about Eddie. They were very, very similar guitar players. Eddie took that tapping thing to another level. Randy could do that, but he liked people like Leslie West.

"It amazes me that you get Eddie, you get Randy, and you go, 'No one's ever gonna top that.' But there's a new thing round every corner."

Aside from the new album's formidable guitar army, Watt gathered a group of rotating players to create rhythm tracks from which to build the songs. Chili Pepper Chad Smith returns as drummer on most tracks, while Foo Fighter Taylor Hawkins kept the beat on a few songs, recorded just months before his tragic death this past March.

Even with all the guests, the sound from track to track is cohesive, not scattered. Duff McKagan from Guns N' Roses returns on bass for a few numbers, and bassist Robert Trujillo, who left Osbourne's band to join Metallica in 2003, plays on six songs. "He hadn't changed a bit," says Osbourne, who recalls Trujillo as a good collaborator. The bass player was in the band long enough to play on Ozzy's *Down to Earth* album in 2001 before his drama-free exit.

"Everybody that comes along, I'll go, Listen, if you get a gig that you want more than me, all I ask is you give me time to replace you. Don't just say, 'I'm leaving tomorrow.' It's not fair. And Robert did right," says Ozzy. "He's a good man, good guy, good bass player."

"My reputation precedes me because they think I'm a fucking lunatic, but I was for many years." — Ozzy Osbourne

Many rockers who have worked with Watt agree on one thing: he's fast. *Ordinary Man* came together quicker than any previous Ozzy solo record, and *Patient Number 9* was more of the same, though spread out over several months of the coronavirus and other interruptions. It sometimes gave Osbourne whiplash.

"Andrew's a piece of cake. It's just that sometimes you have to hold him down, because when you are still on verse one, he's onto the next song in his head," Osbourne explains with a laugh. But for Wylde, who has labored with Ozzy in studios for decades, beginning with 1988's *No Rest for the Wicked* and 1991's *No More Tears*, the new pace is a welcome development.

"We'd be sitting in a room jamming over these things over and over," recalls Wylde of early projects with endless rehearsals and second-guessing. "I remember when we were doing 'No More Tears,' it's like, 'We know the song, let's just record this thing already. We don't have to sit in rehearsals and pound this thing for hours.'"

During some Nineties sessions in Bearsville, New York, Ozzy and the band were getting acquainted with the studio, as the in-house engineer told them of some illustrious history that was made on the same console. Wylde remembers one moment in particular:

"He's going, 'Oz, you know what was recorded on this? *Tommy*.' Oz goes, 'Huh? Who's Tommy?' And he is like, 'Come on, Oz. You know, *Tommy* was recorded on this.' Oz goes, 'Who the fuck is Tommy?' He says 'The Who! *Tommy* the opera!'

"Oz goes, 'Ohh,' and then Oz leans over to me and goes, 'They're going to have to use coal to fire this thing up!' The guy was sitting there trying to impress Ozzy with these historical facts and Ozzy's just oblivious. He's not a gearhead. He's like, 'Just gimme the mic and let me sing.'"

OSBOURNE IS A LIFELONG BEATLES FANATIC. SO, OF COURSE, HE WATCHED THE new Peter Jackson documentary *The Beatles: Get Back*, absorbing every one of its 468 minutes for clues and inspiration. "I play them all the time still," says Ozzy, who shared the same devotion to the Liverpool pop band as fellow metal originators of his generation: Lemmy Kilmister, his Sabbath bandmates, and Ronnie James Dio. "The Beatles invented so many new things. They were fucking really innovative."

His main complaint about the documentary, he admits, was the lack of serious conflict shown on-camera at the recording sessions. He experienced something different from his own five decades of work in the studio, starting with the single 12-hour session that created Black Sabbath's eponymous 1970 debut. "It was too tidy," he says of the Beatles doc. "They must have argued. Every fucking band argues."

He notes that Paul McCartney is still recording and touring at age 80. ("He looks fucking great!") As long as Ozzy can get healthy and stay that way, it's an example worth aspiring to — and the singer is already talking with Watt about their next project together. He's not finished yet.

"The question I'm asked a lot is, 'Which of your albums do you consider the best one?'" says Ozzy. "Well, I haven't done it yet. I could say *Diary* or any of the ones right after that. But then that means that every one after those ain't no good. That's why I'll keep striving. It keeps you alive." Ⓡ

PAUL NATKIN/GETTY IMAGES

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The title of the record - like all Goatwhore releases - is both deep and direct, vocalist Louis Ben Falgoust II knowing exactly where he is coming from. "It is a basis of human despondency, the arc of life and its relationship with the personal abyss of overwhelming emotion and thought. A mixture of esoteric ideas and biblical scripts and the journey to the places some people care not to venture on mental paths. The rise and fall of the self and how the abyss can be a turning point for some and a passageway to oblivion for others. It is blunt and to the point, just like countless aspects of life."

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October 7, 2022

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"I'd written a bunch of stuff that didn't quite fit into traditional song structures, and I've always been drawn to bands where the instruments provide hooks, rather than relying on a lyric. It seemed like a good time to start something new and see where it could go." – **Justin Foley**

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Mustaine

Dave Mustaine pulls no punches – with his vicious thrash metal or his brutal honesty. We put the latter to the test with our readers' most burning questions. He did not disappoint.

TEXT **Dan Epstein**

Megadeth, (from left) James LoMenzo, Dirk Verbeuren, Dave Mustaine and Kiko Loureiro, 2022

"WHENEVER THE WORLD KIND OF HARDSHIP, METAL

SAYS MEGADETH MAIN MAN DAVE MUSTAINE WITH a rueful laugh. "And I don't know why that is. I wish we were a little bit more associated with *good* times."

As you can probably guess from its title, *The Sick, the Dying... And the Dead!* — Megadeth's 16th and latest studio album — isn't the record that suddenly recasts the iconic thrash metal ensemble as a good-time party band. But the album is cause for serious celebration, just the same. The first new Megadeth outing since 2016's *Dystopia*, *The Sick, the Dying... And the Dead!* features 12 uncompromising songs as only Mustaine and Co. can deliver. Co-produced with Chris Rakestraw, who previously worked with the band on *Dystopia*, tracks like "Life in Hell," "Night Stalkers" (which features a cameo from Ice-T), "Killing Time" and the first single "We'll Be Back" burn with fury and precision to spare.

"I think this record is gonna excite a lot of people," says Mustaine when *Revolver* catches up with him before the album's September release. "It's got some of the best songs I've ever written on it, and we've got a lot of songs on there that have a faster tempo than anything we've done for a very long time. I was just talking with my guitar tech, and he said that 'Night Stalkers' was the fastest BPM we've ever had on *any* song."

Of course, the truly good news is not just that Megadeth are back in fine, ass-kicking fettle, but that they're even back at all. Six years is the longest wait we've ever had to endure between Megadeth albums. And while the COVID-19 pandemic certainly played a role in *The Sick, the Dying... And the Dead!*'s delay, Mustaine's battle with throat cancer — which he was diagnosed with in 2019 — presented an even more fearsome obstacle. Thankfully, with the help of his doctors and a typically pugnacious personal attitude towards the disease, Mustaine was not only able to beat it, but his snarling vocals sound powerful and positively revitalized on the new record.

"I had two really bad days in chemo," Mustaine recalls. "It was at the start [of treatment] and I thought, This is gonna get worse. But it didn't. My system is really strong from living on the street all those years. And I think that, when it came down to it, I knew I was in a fight. I knew I had an alien in my system, my immunity was being challenged, and I took it like any other thing — 'You want to fight? Let's go!'"

Mustaine also credits the support and understanding of lead guitarist Kiko Loureiro and drummer Dirk Verbeuren — the latter of whom makes his recorded Megadeth debut on the new album (ex–Lamb of God

OPENING SPREAD AND THIS PAGE: TRAVIS SHINN

PER OLE HAGEN/REDFERNS

IS GOING THROUGH SOME MUSIC BECOMES POPULAR,"

drummer Chris Adler played on *Dystopia*) — with helping him through some of the rougher patches during the making of *The Sick, the Dying… And the Dead!* "There were a lot of times where I looked like shit and I felt like shit," he says. "But those guys, bless their hearts, just kept loving on me and helping me, and we just kept playing. And to have Kiko and Dirk's songwriting abilities on the record was another gift." (Verbeuren co-wrote "Life in Hell" with Mustaine, and he and Loureiro both helped write "Night Stalkers.")

Still, it wouldn't be Megadeth without some lineup upheaval. In May 2021, bassist David Ellefson — who'd held down the low end for the first two decades of the band's existence, then returned to the fold in 2010 after an eight-year absence — was given his walking papers following allegations of sexual misconduct. Testament bassist Steve Di Giorgio was called in for the recording sessions, though him replacing Ellefson in Megadeth was never an option. "Steve's a tremendous player, but I'm not a guy that likes to poach people from other bands," Mustaine explains. "And Steve had made it really clear as well in the beginning that he would be coming in to help us, but that he was in Testament."

Instead, former White Lion/Black Label Society bassist James LoMenzo — who was previously a member of Megadeth from 2006 to 2010, playing on 2007's *United Abominations* and 2009's *Endgame* in the process — rejoined the band this spring as a permanent member. "Everybody loves James and he's just a great, great guy, so it wasn't a hard decision at all to make," Mustaine explains. "We've just had this closeness, the four of us, since James came in. They're always together — James is down at the bar having a glass of wine with Kiko, or James is at the gym working out with Dirk. Honestly, it couldn't be better."

Throughout the nearly four decades since Megadeth first emerged with 1985's ferocious *Killing Is My Business… And Business Is Good!*, Mustaine has proved a consistently captivating character who isn't afraid to speak his mind — and his fans just can't seem to get enough of his refreshing candor, whatever the subject. So, when we offered to be a go-between and ask him some questions directly from *Revolver* readers, he was, unsurprisingly, more than happy to oblige. The queries (and his answers) span a wide range of topics, from white rhinos and Big Four riff-offs to mixed martial arts and playing metal on the moon. And do you know what Elton John song Dave is dying to cover? Read on to find out the answer to that, and much more…

Megadeth, (from left) Marty Friedman, Mustaine, Nick Menza and David Ellefson, circa 1992

Countdown to Extinction turned 30 this year. What messages in the album remain relevant today? And do you think humanity is moving closer to, or further away from, extinction? —*Larissa Oliveira*

I think there's a lot of messages on *Countdown* that are relevant today. In the title track itself, the Japanese actress who did the voice-over in the middle of the song says, "One hour from now, another species of life-form will disappear off the face of the planet forever. And the rate is accelerating." And so if you figure that was written 30 years ago, and every hour another form of life disappears, it's gotta be a lot less [species] than that now, right? And one that I know of is the wide-lipped rhino, which is also known as the [northern] white rhino. The last [male] one just died recently, so no more white rhinos.

If there was a thrash "riff-off" between the Big Four guitarists to see who is the fastest down-picker, who would come out on top?
— Art Dratch

Fastest down-picker? I don't know that that would be me. It would probably be [James] Hetfield or Kerry [King]. Kerry's a very fast player, and he's very talented at what he does. But I never really watched his picking method to see if it was all down-picking or if it was pedaling, which goes back and forth — some people call it butterfly picking, other people call it pedaling. But yeah, it's gotta be James or Kerry. I'd love to say it's me, and I'm sure I've got some really fast down-picking stuff, but I still think those guys are great, and Hetfield's still one of my favorite rhythm guitar players.

Let me go on the record right now, too — I saw the thing with James onstage where he was saying that he was going through a rough patch. And I was sad to see that because, you know, it's been one of those really weird love-hate relationships [with me and Metallica]. The only reason I ever even pursued any of this was I really *liked* those guys. If I didn't like them, I would just say, "Yeah, flush the toilet and we're done with it." But James, he's always been somebody that I really liked playing with. I wished things wouldn't have ended the way that they did, but *que sera sera*. [*Mustaine was Metallica's lead guitarist until 1983, when he was fired before they recorded their debut* Kill 'Em All.] It was a dumb thing that I did by taking my dog up to practice, and it was even dumber to punch [James Hetfield]. So having said that, I really respect him, I respect his playing, and I hope he knows that there are a lot of people out there like me that like him as a person and don't give two fucks about him being in Metallica.

WHAT'S YOUR ALL-TIME FAVORITE GUITAR SOLO THAT YOU HAVE RECORDED?
— Darius Isley

I think "Something That I'm Not" and "The Scorpion" from *The System Has Failed* have really great solos on them. And, of course, the solos in "Hangar 18" and "Holy Wars" are great. And the solo on "Chosen Ones," which is a really great song... But you know, these are songs and solos that I think a lot of the people that listen to Megadeth music are super-familiar with. But if I say, "The solo on 'Losing My Senses' is my favorite solo," I think a lot of people would say, "Wow, what record is *that* on?"

TOP: MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS; BOTTOM: TIM MOSENFELDER/WIREIMAGE

Outside of music, what's the thing that gives you the most pleasure these days? — *Zeke*

My family, our kids and our animals. We've got a lot of stuff that we do as a family — our wine business, our beer business, the music business — but that's *business*. As far as the family's concerned, we're a really, really super-tight family. And, yeah, that's my crown jewel, the way that my marriage and my children have turned out.

How did your cancer diagnosis change your approach to life, family and faith? And has it influenced your musical direction? — *Talon and Tooth*

It *has* influenced the music a little bit, because I had to kind of regroup, you know? There were some things that were going on, and I was dealing with learning how to live life with cancer. I'm a fighter; I figured, "You know what? That cancer's gonna *die* in my body; *I'm* not gonna be the one that's going." And sure enough, man, we kicked its ass — the [medical] team was great, and I'm here to tell about it now. But when I went out on tour and started playing, I was having a little bit of difficulty with my voice. So I thought, I'm just gonna [start] from scratch and try and recover and heal myself and do all the right stuff. And you know what? I ended up singing better than I have for a very, very long time, and I was able to hit a lot of the high notes that I wasn't able to do anymore. And that was worth everything.

Mustaine with daughter Electra Mustaine and wife Pamela Anne Casselberry, 2016

WHAT ARE YOUR THREE FAVORITE NON-METAL ALBUMS THAT METALHEADS SHOULD CHECK OUT? — *Matthew Stanton*

Well, I always liked the first [self-titled] Crowded House record. I thought that was great because it reminded me of a new Beatles. Another one I would say is Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*, with headphones — listen to it with headphones on. And then the third one, *Goodbye Yellow Brick Road* by Elton John. That's more excellent songwriting, and the guitar player he had at the time, Davey Johnstone, was an awesome player. "All the Girls Love Alice," what a great song! I would love to do that song as a cover.

LEFT: JEREMY SAFFER; RIGHT: RICK DIAMOND/GETTY IMAGES

Back in 1987, you guys brought Steve Jones in to play guitar on your cover of the Sex Pistols' "Anarchy in the U.K." What was that experience like? — *Johnny "Mac" McHale*

That was pretty fun. Steve was pretty vulgar — I mean, he's a Sex Pistol, why wouldn't he be? He comes in riding on his motorcycle, sitting on his guitar case, and he's got a broken arm. I asked him what happened, and he said, "Oh, some woman pulled out in front of me, and I ended up on the hood." We start playing, and I don't know if he didn't have a guitar tech at the time, if he didn't know how to tune his guitar or what was going on, but his guitar was totally out of tune. The other thing that was really quite bizarre was when I asked him what he wanted to get paid to do this, because we had figured a thousand bucks cash would be plenty for him at the time; he's a Sex Pistol, he's not a union session guy. So I said, "We've got a thousand dollars to pay you." And he says, "How about a hundred dollars and some suction?" And I'm thinking to myself, I'm sorry, bro, but I just don't know a single girl that would wanna put your meat in her mouth. [*Laughs*] We joked around a little bit during the session, but I loved it. I love Steve; I think he's the real deal.

Mustaine, circa 1988

AS A SPORTS FAN, WHO'S THE ATHLETE THAT YOU ADMIRE THE MOST, AND WHY? — *Tommy Wang*

[Mixed martial artist and UFC multi-division champion] Georges St-Pierre, because he's a class athlete. He doesn't chest bump, he doesn't finger wag; I don't have any recollection of him being a trash talker. He was good for the sport. He was good for the community where he lives. I actually went to the school that he had trained at for some of his career, and met with one of the professors that he trained with, which was great. I got to roll with him, and we talked about Georges. So yeah, he's my favorite athlete of all. There's some other athletes I like, but I don't know enough about them to go out and give them my endorsement.

MICHAEL UHLL/REDFERNS

NEW FROM *METAL BLADE*

KINGS OF MERCIA

Self-titled debut

September 23, 2022

The combination of big riffs, driving rhythms, thick yet lithe bass lines and rich vocal melodies has made for some of the greatest music of all time, and in the hands of Kings Of Mercia this recipe is intoxicating. The new project features guitarist Jim Matheos (**Fates Warning, OSI, Tuesday the Sky**) along with the vocal talents of Steve Overland (**FM**). The duo are joined on their debut album by the dynamic rhythm section of drummer extraordinaire Simon Phillips (ex-**Toto, Derek Sherinian**), and bassist Joey Vera (**Fates Warning, Armored Saint**).

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TALAS

Formed in the early 70s and dissolved in 1985, they may have never reached arena-headlining status but they were an integral part of the early 80s hard rock scene, and their long awaited return does not disappoint.

Asked why people should be excited for this comeback, bassist Billy Sheehan answers enthusiastically. *"Because so many of them were there, with us, and a million other great bands that made the 80s such a special musical experience. And also there are so many who might not have been there but have fallen in love with that spirit as well. We feel a very special bond with them all."*

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September 23, 2022

A-Z

"I found this a chance to do something completely different than what I am used to, being in a prog metal band for 30 years. I find the blend of the 80s, 90s and a touch of 70s style of music very cool, and it is great to work with Mark after all of these years." – **Ray Alder**

Self-titled debut

August 12, 2022

RAY ALDER: Lead and Backing Vocals
PHILIP BYNOE: Bass Guitar
VIVIEN LALU: Keyboards
JOOP WOLTERS: Guitars
MARK ZONDER: Drums

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If you didn't have such a successful career in music, what could you imagine yourself doing career-wise? And if you'd gone to college, what area of study interests you the most? — *Tricia Wright*

I *did* go to college, and I was taking business management. But if I wasn't a musician, I would probably want to be a doctor helping children, and be able to go and do some Doctors Without Borders journeys — anything to help, you know? I love being able to help people. I went through my life for so long being on my own, being alone, having nobody. And then the time that I spent homeless was the worst, the absolute fucking worst. So I know what that's like; I know what it feels like to be homeless. I know what it feels like to be hungry. That's why I wrote "Breadline" [from *Risk*]. We went past a soup kitchen every day, and talk about a sad thing to see: men and women lined up outside of a building just for a bowl of broth. And it makes me wanna try that much harder to help people and understand people.

WHAT'S THE ONE THING YOU WANT TO DO WITH MEGADETH THAT YOU HAVEN'T DONE YET?
— *shreddergoblin*

I guess it's just a matter of where we would be performing, and maybe who we're performing with. I've got a couple people that I was thinking would be really cool to star in some of the videos we've got coming up. And, you know, I think it would be really cool to play in a non-gravity airplane. But I hear the way that that happens is, you go up into the air and they pitch the plane down, and I don't know that I'm gonna be cool with a plane nosediving to the earth. I mean, I'm cool with skydiving, but the idea of becoming a dirt dart doesn't appeal to me. [*Laughs*] So maybe I'll wait until we can do the first gig up on the moon.

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LORNASH CORE

TEXT
Eli Enis

PHOTOGRAPHY
Jason Goodrich

The New Jersey crew have weathered crises that would've crushed a weaker band. Here's how they beat the odds to become the new faces of deathcore.

PICTURE THIS.

IT'S THE FIRST DAY OF LOLLAPALOOZA, THE ANNUAL Chicago music retreat that aggregates the pop, rap and alt-rock laureates of today and spreads them across a packed lineup headlined by budding classic-rock heroes like Metallica and Green Day. Dusk is approaching and you're in that weary limbo between the substances you gleefully downed at 2 p.m. and whatever it is you'll be depending on to get you through Lil Baby's raucous set that night. You're aimlessly wandering throughout the festival grounds, picking up the distant bass rumbles of DJ Black Coffee, the wafting croons of R&B star Jazmine Sullivan and the bracing sneers of TikTok pop breakout Ashnikko.

Suddenly, a fresh frequency rises out of this heady sonic haze. A racket that's never penetrated the mall-friendly fortress of Lollapalooza in its 30-year history — a cacophonous blend of blastbeats, breakdowns and what sounds like a rabid warthog sparring violently with a hangry werewolf. There, nestled between the quaint Grant Park greenery of the BMI side-stage are Lorna Shore, the fastest-rising deathcore band in the world unleashing their stylized brootality to a couple thousand freaks windmilling on the fringes of normie-dom. They're certainly the bill's most glaring outlier, but Lorna Shore are — as the festival's ethos purports — a band who any modern music fan needs to know.

Deathcore emerged as extreme music's newest and most divisive young thing at the turn of the Aughts on the backs of Myspace breakouts Job for a Cowboy and All Shall Perish, who were pairing death metal's demonic intensity with the belligerent breakdowns and new-school production of metalcore. Within the next several years, landmark records like Whitechapel's 2008 staple, *This Is Exile*, and Suicide Silence's 2009 scene-kid hit, *No Time to Bleed*, launched deathcore onto Warped Tour stages and Hot Topic T-shirt racks. However, by the mid-2010s the genre's zeitgeisty appeal plateaued and the style went back underground, where it was nursed by a niche yet fiercely devoted fanbase that's lately begun to sprawl outward again thanks to music-centered platforms like TikTok — the perfect medium for sharing 15-second clips of breakdowns and pig squeals. Right now, Lorna Shore are the biggest and most visible players in this new wave of deathcore that — thanks to modern production and a whole decade's worth of genre history to reference — is sounding heavier, sleeker and more musically dynamic than almost any of the tentpole records from 10 years back.

Lorna Shore's 2021 single "To the Hellfire" introduced YouTube vocal maestro Will Ramos as their new frontman. The song became an unexpected viral hit largely thanks to Ramos' animalistic snorts and ghoulish shrieks during its bludgeoning final breakdown, which gave the group's signature mix of deathcore nuts and bolts (neck-snapping breakdowns, twisted

PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: ENISE ALPAYDIN

Lorna Shore, (from left) Andrew O'Connor, Adam De Micco, Will Ramos, Michael Yager and Austin Archey

melodeath riffage) and symphonic black-metal ambiance (baroque atmospheres, pained emotions) a fresh twist. "I have a very different sound than a lot of vocalists," Ramos says. "There's a lot of emotion, but it's not angry emotion. It's, like, sad. You don't feel that a lot in this genre, and I think that's why a lot of people are going to love our new fucking album."

That new fucking album is *Pain Remains*, and it's a banger. Based on the strength of this fourth record — and the exposure from booking increasingly high-profile tours with Parkway Drive and more — it's looking like Lorna Shore are about to launch out of the hellfire and into the stratosphere.

Given the energy, enthusiasm and buzz surrounding these fast-ascending underdogs, it's easy to mistake Lorna Shore for a fledgling band on the come-up. Instead, this moment is only one of several fresh starts that the New Jersey crew has experienced since forming in 2010. Over the past decade-plus, Lorna Shore have weathered multiple existential crises that would've crushed a weaker band. As recently as two years ago, they were unceremoniously left in the lurch without a vocalist (for the second time) and uniformly written off by deathcore commenters who thought their days were numbered. Now, newly revitalized and revamped with their most solid lineup yet, they're on their way to becoming the new faces of the genre. And no one is more surprised than the band themselves.

"As big of a dreamer as I am, I never thought what is happening right now would be possible for a band like ours," says drummer Austin Archey.

Although he's one of the longest-running players in the band, Archey isn't a founding member. Technically, there isn't one in Lorna Shore's current lineup; but the band didn't *properly* begin until guitarist Adam De Micco joined several months after their formation and immediately assumed principal songwriting duties. Wikipedia paints a murky picture of the band's first year, and, at the time of this interview, stated that a guy named Ray fronted the group before their first *real* vocalist Tom Barber joined. But De Micco's never even heard of the guy.

"Ray?" he asks with a confused huff. "I don't even know who that is."

The 34-year-old De Micco didn't actually pick up an instrument until he was 18. But when he finally did, he took to it with a vengeance. After playing in several do-nothing local bands in his early twenties, the hyper-determined musician was ready to channel his myriad extreme-metal influences into a career project. Enter Lorna Shore. After his old bandmate Barber tapped him to replace OG guitarist Aaron Brown, De Micco and Lorna Shore began writing the material that would become 2012's *Bone Kingdom* EP (which many fans consider the band's first proper release).

> "Everyone's narrative was, 'I'm writing this band off. This band's not going anywhere.' It's like, OK, cool. Hold my beer. I'm just going to shove it down your throat and just make it where you're fucking tired of seeing the band. So, you're welcome."
> — Adam De Micco

They pushed through and completed the songs; but the members' conflicting musical goals resulted in a messy writing process that De Micco didn't want to repeat. So, he decided to grab the creative reins — and issued a candid ultimatum to his bandmates.

"If you like it, cool. If you don't, then don't be in this band," the guitarist recounts. Two members left and Archey joined the fold, establishing a creative bond between him and De Micco that would keep the band intact in the tumultuous years to come.

De Micco's attitude might come across as curt. But Lorna Shore was a make-or-break moment for the New Jersey native, and the frustrating tribulations of this period came within inches of driving him out of the band life entirely. After De Micco put what would become Lorna Shore's signature blackened deathcore spin on their next EP, *Maleficium*, they were stuck waiting an egregious year to receive the mixes back from the producer — and had to keep postponing the release date. At the same time, the band were earning a reputation among local promoters for running with a "tougher crowd," making it difficult for them to play in their own region and forcing them to gig out of state where nobody knew who they were.

Between the challenge of playing live and having to put their new music on the backburner, De Micco (who was funding the band by tirelessly working two jobs) decided that if *Maleficium* landed on deaf ears, then he'd just quit and head to school at Berklee the following semester. "This is not really worth it," he remembers thinking of the stressful period that could've abruptly ended Lorna Shore as we know it.

But that's not how the story goes. Once *Maleficium* dropped in December 2013, the video for lead single "Godmaker" became a runaway hit in the trenches of deathcore YouTube, and suddenly Lorna Shore were getting swarmed with emails from the same managers, booking agents and labels who ignored them just a few months earlier. Then they got another big break when deathcore pioneers Carnifex asked them to open a small tour, and by 2015, Lorna Shore had signed to a label and released their debut album, *Psalms*.

Sadly, it proved to be yet another instance of taking one step forward and another back. De Micco reflects on the entire process of writing and releasing *Psalms* as a "train wreck of a situation."

"We just didn't know how to operate as a band," he says of their naivete, which included expecting their producer to do the songwriting legwork and relying on their cover artist to synthesize their artistic vision. "We had high expectations of getting better opportunities and we didn't," he says of *Psalms*' lukewarm release. "It just fell by the wayside."

They took the exact opposite approach for their follow-up, 2017's *Flesh Coffin*. Rather than entering the studio with only a handful of vague song ideas, De Micco grinded to ensure the writing was fully fleshed out before they recorded. The extra effort is evident in the professional sound of the record and the game-changing reaction it garnered. With an enthusiastic fan response, Lorna Shore got offered a spot on the Summer Slaughter tour — an extreme-metal "rite of passage," as De Micco puts it — and they played roughly 220 shows that year, solidifying their place in the deathcore landscape and rejuvenating the morale of the band behind the scenes.

Just when things were looking brighter than ever for Lorna Shore, the dark clouds rolled in. At the end of 2017, the band toured Europe with genre titans Chelsea Grin. Vocalist Alex Koehler was struggling with health issues and unable to perform, so Chelsea Grin asked other singers from the tour, including Barber, to fill in for various sets. Once Lorna Shore returned home, a series of interpersonal disputes caused a rift in the band. Barber quit shortly thereafter to join Chelsea Grin, who had been quietly courting the vocalist to replace Koehler.

As De Micco tells it, this was a reality he feared would happen despite Barber's reassurance that his budding relationship with Chelsea Grin wasn't anything more than a friendship. "It's like if you're dating a girl and she's just like, 'Oh, this dude keeps hitting on me, but I'm not interested in him.' Then you end up finding out they are having an affair behind your back."

De Micco says he and Barber have since made amends. But at the time, his sudden exit destroyed Lorna Shore's high spirits and left them flailing without a vocalist — ahead of a studio session that was already booked. Faced with an uncertain future, the band could have easily given up. Instead, Lorna Shore

turned Barber's departure into a galvanizing moment that fueled their motivation to continue.

"I'm not going to just take this lying down," De Micco remembers thinking. In fact, Archey doesn't believe they'd be "a band at all" if Barber didn't leave. "If anything, that lit a fire in Adam and I's hearts to prove the world wrong," he says.

The remaining members — De Micco, Archey, and second guitarist Connor Deffley — started putting feelers out for new vocalists. They ended up landing on CJ McCreery — the frontman of their Pittsburgh-based deathcore contemporaries and recent tourmates Signs of the Swarm. De Micco describes their initial arrangement as transactional and fast-moving. "Literally, the first day I hung out with him was on the way to the studio," he remembers.

After several months spent touring and recording an album with McCreery, De Micco's priority of keeping the band afloat was succeeding — but the vibes had changed dramatically. Deffley left the group just before they hit the studio in 2019 to record the following year's *Immortal*, and McCreery, who lived seven hours away from De Micco and Archey, remained distant from his two bandmates.

"The dynamic basically became [that] this band is a business," De Micco explains. "Which was weird because it had always been a group of friends writing music."

By the end of 2019, De Micco says that a variety of internal tensions formed between McCreery and the others, which now included new guitarist Andrew O'Connor. They weren't getting along behind the scenes and seemed to want different things out of the band. De Micco says that prior to *Immortal*'s release date in January 2020, they had privately decided to part ways with McCreery once the album dropped. Then, in late December, a series of accusations of sexual misconduct against McCreery were shared online — and that's when Lorna Shore publicly announced that McCreery was no longer a part of the band.

Once again, for the second time in two years, Lorna Shore were left without a frontman, and this time they had an album dropping just a few weeks later. "It was awful," says De Micco of the period surrounding *Immortal*'s release, even though the fans' response to the record was overwhelmingly positive. "It was one of these records with this asterisk next to it, you know? How am I supposed to be excited about it when we don't even have a vocalist?"

At the same exact time, in the same state, Will Ramos was going through a similar musical crisis. The vocalist had spent the last decade cutting his teeth in several bands that all made waves regionally but never became career pursuits in the way he desired. After dropping out of engineering school during his third year to pursue a band that wasn't working out, Ramos knew that he needed to find the right group of musicians — or he'd have to pivot to something else entirely. "This is my last straw, dude," he remembers telling himself.

Suddenly, he got offered to send vocal demos over

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to Lorna Shore, a fellow New Jersey band who he'd been following and idolizing since the *Bone Kingdom* years. De Micco says he and his bandmates were having trouble finding the right person during their search to quickly replace McCreery for a fast-approaching tour. Then late one night they stumbled onto some of Ramos' popular YouTube vocal covers of deathcore songs and decided to give him a shot. Ramos sent the demos back immediately, and De Micco and Co. were impressed enough to invite him to be their fill-in vocalist on the upcoming tour.

Ramos was so stoked he didn't even let himself believe it was real until he actually got onstage with the band. "You get offers all the time for things, but it never actually happens until something happens," he says.

COVID hit right at the end of the tour, and after several months of putting the band on the backburner, the group reconvened to record a three-song EP to see how their dynamic with Ramos played out in the studio. "I guess my big fear was I didn't want to blow my load and [then decide] he wasn't the guy for us, and then find ourselves in a position for a fourth time, finding another vocalist," De Micco says of his cautious demeanor during Ramos' early time in the band.

Fortunately, the recording sessions — which were released as 2021's *...And I Return to Nothingness* — went great, and De Micco knew that this new era of the band was going to blow people's minds, even as the internet hate steamrolled in. "The moment that we parted ways with CJ, everyone's narrative was, 'I'm writing this band off. This band's not going anywhere. This band's going to suck,'" De Micco recalls.

Once again, he was encouraged by the doubters. "It's like, OK, cool. Hold my beer. I'm going to show you how bad we're going to suck. I'm just going to shove it down your throat and just make it to the point where we're at now, where you're fucking tired of seeing the band. So, you're welcome."

The celebratory response to last year's songs was affirming, but the whole band would rather talk about Lorna Shore's future than sit around and pat themselves on the back. Archey calls *Pain Remains* "the most genuine album this band has ever made." De Micco knows the songs are great because "they took the life out of me" to write, as he and his bandmates pulled 12-hour days in the studio to perfect them.

While the instrumentation is tighter and bolder than anything they've ever released, it's Ramos' unique perspective that's most felt — from his beastly growls and banshee-like shrieks to the sad emotionality of his delivery and the poignant lyrics he brings to a genre that's rife with one-dimensional anger and gory prose.

"I've always wanted to make music like this," Ramos enthuses, radiating pride for how the album sounds and how the songs make him feel. "Sometimes, I get high and I just fucking listen to the music with my stereo speakers, and I just cry, dude. And I'm like, 'Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck.'" Pain may remain, but for the first time in Lorna Shore's history, there's room for overwhelming joy in there, too. Ⓡ

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Lamb of God

TEXT
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TRAVIS SHINN

Revolver ranked the Virginia metal stalwarts' albums from worst to best, and Mark Morton was not pleased. Here, the guitarist does it his way.

A LITTLE OVER A YEAR AGO, WE RANKED LAMB OF GOD'S ALBUMS FROM WORST TO BEST. GUITARIST MARK MORTON DISAGREED with our assessment — and said so publicly. "I don't remember *Revolver*'s exact list, but I do remember that I chimed in on the flaming cesspool that is my Twitter account and said, 'This list is wrong,' or something to that effect," he recalls with a laugh. "But at that time, I didn't really have my own list."

Fast forward to right about now. Being the benevolent overlords that we are, we decided to get Morton to rank Lamb of God's albums himself. In the interest of consistency, he informed us that he'd be ranking the eight records that were available at the time of this interview. That means the band's ninth album, *Omens*, which dropped on October 7th, will not be included. "I don't think it's fair to include *Omens* on the list because your readership can't listen to it yet to agree or disagree," Morton points out.

Coming so quickly on the heels of their 2020 self-titled album, *Omens* arrives with an extreme sense of urgency. It's as if being cooped up during the pandemic — like all of us — stirred up a new level of aggression within Lamb of God. Lead single "Nevermore" is singer Randy Blythe's scorching take on the political turmoil surrounding the removal of Civil War statues in the band's hometown of Richmond, Virginia. The staccato machine-gun bark of "Ditch" is Morton's assertion that the world's dismal state is simply humanity reaping what we've sewn. Meanwhile, the titanium-strength groove of the title track seems to beckon the end of civilization. For Morton, it's peak Lamb of God — both musically and internally. "We're very united as a band right now," he says. "The way we wrote this album was very collaborative. Everyone was engaged and everyone had a voice."

Lamb of God also recorded *Omens* mostly live, which is not the way albums are typically tracked these days. "Something like 75 percent of the vocals you hear were recorded in the booth by Randy while the band was tracking the music live on the floor," Morton explains. "People don't record albums like that anymore. They're usually done one member at a time. This was all five of us at the same time."

As Morton turns his attention back to the list at hand, he pauses. "I should preface this by mentioning that I don't really listen to Lamb of God very often," he says. "Until today, I didn't really have a list of my own in mind. I just disagreed in principle with the *Revolver* list. I'd also like to add the disclaimer that we could've done this interview tomorrow and my list might've looked different. But today — this is what the list looks like."

Lamb of God, (from left) Art Cruz, Mark Morton, Randy Blythe, John Campbell and Willie Adler, 2022

8. VII: STURM UND DRANG

FOR MORTON, THE BAND'S 2015 ALBUM IS AT THE bottom of the barrel — mostly because of the atmosphere amongst the members at that time. "This album is my least favorite because there was a lot of tension within the band on multiple levels," he says. "It was a really tumultuous period, and relationships within the band were strained. For me personally, it was a time of conflict and turmoil and personal struggle."

Anyone familiar with Lamb of God's history probably knows what he's talking about. *Sturm und Drang* was their first album after Blythe's imprisonment and manslaughter trial in the Czech Republic — and their last with longtime drummer Chris Adler. "While I certainly wrote a lot of material for that record, I didn't feel that connected to the artistry or the process of recording it," Morton explains. "I think there are some good songs on that record: '512' is one of our biggest songs and 'Embers' with Chino [Moreno of the Deftones] is a high point. But most of it seems really flat. I just think the material isn't that strong."

Blythe (left) and Adler at *Resolution*'s album release show, New York City, 2012

JIMMY HUBBARD

7. RESOLUTION

"THE REASON THIS IS SO LOW ON THE LIST IS, again, this was a pretty rough time for me," Morton says of Lamb of God's 2012 album. "I've been pretty open about my issues with drug addiction and alcoholism. I'm firmly in long-term recovery now, but I wasn't then. I was really struggling. There's great work on this album — I contributed music and lyrics that I'm really proud of — but this was a really dark period for me. So I just don't have a warm fuzzy feeling about this album."

Beyond that, it's just too long. With 14 songs and a nearly hour-long runtime, *Resolution* could've used a haircut.

"If we had left four songs off this record — I'm not gonna say which ones — this would shoot up the list probably three or four spots," Morton acknowledges. "It's just weighed down with what feels like filler songs. The reason they're there is that different people were fighting for different songs, so our solution at the time was to just put it all on there. I think we were trying to avoid conflict, so we just kicked that can down the road."

Blythe, Dallas, 2006

"'Redneck' might be your favorite song of the Aughts, but Sacrament is not the greatest Lamb of God album." — Mark Morton

5. SACRAMENT

"EVERYBODY ALWAYS PUTS *ASHES* AND *Sacrament* as our number one and two albums, but I think *Sacrament* is inconsistent," Morton says. "It has some of our greatest songs on it, but for it to be the great album everyone seems to think it is, it should be better from top to bottom. 'Redneck' might be your favorite song of the Aughts, but this is not the greatest Lamb of God album. For every great song, there's a song I wanna skip."

Still, Morton acknowledges that Lamb of God were in ascendance on 2006's *Sacrament*. "The band was really riding high at this point," he enthuses. "We had done our first major-label record with *Ashes of the Wake* — which was terrifying — and we were back with Machine as producer. But this is the first time we really let him produce. This is why *Sacrament* has lots of effects and reverb and atmosphere — that's us letting Machine do his thing. Some of our best songs are on this record: 'Walk With Me in Hell,' 'Redneck,' 'Descending' — all of those were huge for us."

6. NEW AMERICAN GOSPEL

LAMB OF GOD'S 2000 DEBUT PUT THE BAND ON the map and cemented their new identity after their previous incarnation as Burn the Priest. "I don't want to discount the role this record played in establishing us as a new band and as part of this New Wave of American Heavy Metal that was coming together at the time we put this out," Morton says. "Me putting it this low on the list is in spite of all the great things this record did for us and the doors it opened for us — and the part of the learning process it played for us."

His reason? "The record sounds terrible," he says. "It's tinny and the drums sound horrible. It's got some great riffs on it, but [guitarist] Willie [Adler] and I, our technical execution could've been better. We were still getting our feet under us in terms of being less of a punk-rock band and more of a tightened-up metal band. All of that is growing pains, and I don't have any problem with any of it. But the bottom line is that it sounds like shit. It's pretty much unlistenable."

JIMMY HUBBARD

4. WRATH

FOR MORTON, THIS IS THE REASON WE'RE here today. "This was my problem with the *Revolver* list," he says. "They put *Wrath* last." Indeed, we noted that the band's 2009 album offered "the fewest number of exceptional moments." But Morton begs to differ. "We're not talking about which album your favorite Lamb of God song is on," the guitarist points out. "We're talking about *albums* — and *Wrath* is a solid album, top to bottom. In fact, if listenability from track one 'til the end is the sole factor, *Wrath* is probably our best album."

It's worth noting that *Wrath* was producer Josh Wilbur's first-ever production — and Lamb of God have worked with him on every album since. "Josh apparently lost 15 pounds making this record because he was so scared of screwing up," the guitarist recalls with a laugh. And yet *Wrath* earned two Grammy nominations — for the songs "Set to Fail" and "In Your Words." "I think this album has aged better than any Lamb of God record," Morton offers. "It doesn't sound dated. Whereas if you listen to *Sacrament* or *Ashes of the Wake*, you're back in the Aughts, drinking Jägermeister with a white belt on. *Wrath* sounds current."

3. LAMB OF GOD

LAMB OF GOD'S SELF-TITLED 2020 ALBUM was significant in that it was their first without longtime drummer Chris Adler, who had split the previous year. Former Winds of Plague drummer Art Cruz stepped in to fill the void. "This album answered a lot of questions about the band, about whether we could survive a member change, about whether we were still motivated about our songwriting — and our sustainability and longevity as a band," Morton says. "But we knew what we were doing musically — nothing about the songwriting process changed — so we felt really confident."

"Like *Wrath*, you can listen to this album top-to-bottom," he adds. "It also has one of the biggest songs of the modern era of Lamb of God in 'Memento Mori,' which was massive for us." *Lamb of God* was also Morton's first experience recording an album without being under the influence. "This was the first time I ever wrote a record clean and sober," he says. "I spent most

of my life as an alcoholic/addict, to the point where it was a very entrenched part of my creative process — or at least I thought it was. To face the prospect of having to be creative without the crutch of drugs and alcohol that I depended on for so long — I was terrified. But I had some practice with my solo album, which I made when I wasn't fully in recovery, but definitely in some process, so I had some experience with sober artistry — and I'm here to fly the flag for it."

Morton performing at Roseland Ballroom, New York City, 2009

JIMMY HUBBARD

Lamb of God, Richmond, Virginia, 2003

1. AS THE PALACES BURN

"THIS IS MY FAVORITE ALBUM BECAUSE I like how ferocious it is," Morton says. "It sounds urgent and scarily desperate. It sounds like it's about to fall apart or burst into flames at any minute. I hear the urgency in the guitar tone and Randy's delivery. I know how he recorded this record and what was going on in his life, and it's genuine: He's pissed off and he's raging. And while *Ashes of the Wake* set the mold, this is us flailing around trying all kinds of stuff in that process, and it's exciting. It's the last punk-rock Lamb of God record."

Listening back to Lamb of God's second album — released way back in 2003 — it's easy to recognize what Morton is talking about. What they were able to harness on *As the Palaces Burn* tracks like "Ruin," "Vigil" and "11th Hour" is what caught the ear of many people who count themselves as Lamb of God fans today. "What I hear is a reaction to *New American Gospel*," Morton says. "That album wasn't a realization of what I wanted it to sound like in my head, so I got more heavy-handed in terms of the songs I was trying to develop for *As the Palaces Burn*. I think we were all focused on leveling up. There was a massive stride in growth. That's why I love this record." Ⓡ

2. ASHES OF THE WAKE

AS LAMB OF GOD'S BEST-SELLING ALBUM AND major-label debut in 2004, there's no denying the importance of *Ashes of the Wake* in the band's discography. "This really is the record where the sound and identity of the band solidifies," Morton says. "It sets the template in a very clear way for what Lamb of God will be and what a Lamb of God record will be like. And that template, in a lot of ways, is still in place. It's evolved and we've built on it, but this is where the identity of the band came into form."

Morton recalls the genesis of *Ashes* favorites like "Laid to Rest," "Now You've Got Something to Die For" and "Omerta" coming from the do-or-die mentality the band embraced when they moved up to the big leagues. "Once we started opening arena shows for Slayer and Slipknot, we paid attention and tried to learn because we knew they weren't going to let us hang around if we just kept doing the same old bullshit we'd done to get here," he says. "I don't know why we had the foresight to realize that, but we did."

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The Devil Wears Prada frontman sounds off on his life's passions: from the "fun masochism" of hockey to his beloved road dog Milly

TEXT **John Hill**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Anthony Barlich**

MIKE HRANICA IS A FASCINATING STUDY IN CONTRASTS. TO METAL-core devotees, the Devil Wears Prada frontman is well known for his commanding stage presence and uncanny ability to belt out marathons of screams and snarls. Offstage, however, the vocalist's vibes are *much* different. He's an exceedingly quiet, thoughtful and introspective person who's eager to discuss the latest book he's reading or the album he can't stop spinning. In conversation, he speaks in a measured and considered fashion, occasionally peppered with a few charmingly Midwestern "whatnots."

But when Hranica does pick up that mic, his mild-mannered disposition gets burned away. That fire is on full display throughout the Devil Wears Prada's eighth and latest record *Color Decay*. The new album locks into a sound that the band has been chasing for years: a kind of forward-thinking metalcore filled with lush electronic production and boundary-pushing songwriting that spans pop to post-metal — and includes a hell of a lot of crunchy breakdowns. Hranica's vocals cover a wide swath of emotions, recalling the dynamism of influential forebears including Converge's Jacob Bannon and the Dillinger Escape Plan's Greg Puciato. Take the album standout "Noise," on which Hranica unleashes an exasperated scream as a delightfully hard contrast to singer-guitarist Jeremy DePoyster's perfectly catchy choruses.

Shortly before *Color Decay*'s release and Prada hit the road for a headlining tour, we visited Hranica's home in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to get to know the man behind the mic stand. The vocalist generously offered us a tour of his peaceful living space where he shared the stories behind the passions that keep him grounded: from building furniture and tending plants to playing with his cairn terrier, Milly, and more.

FAVORITE WAY TO ESCAPE
* books

I've got a chair in the corner for reading. But I tend to read more when I'm on tour. That's always the best, finding a space to enjoy the weather and get away from living with 10 other people in extremely close quarters.

For writing [lyrics or fiction] I always prefer using a notebook. So I try to have that on me, especially if I'm going to a place where I know it's going to be conducive, like a coffee shop, art museum or a bar. I like to drink and read and write by myself at bars. I've been coming to find that all my heroes are archivists or considered themselves as such. Henry Rollins talks about how he has shelves and shelves and drawers and drawers of letters that he's saved. I've got a few bins in my basement [filled] with drafts of the things I've written. It feels substantial or rewarding to have a physical means of being able to see it — sitting there with feet and feet of paper rather than something on your computer.

I grew up with terriers. I got my first terrier in 2008 named Marj, who passed away in January. But when Marj was seven I wanted to get her a buddy, so I got Milly. We were writing *Transit Blues* at the time in Wisconsin, and the girl I was dating found her online as a puppy. The woman [that had Milly] was in Colorado Springs — and halfway between there and where I was at ... was Des Moines. So I drove to Des Moines and back one morning with Mil. She's the best. She toured with us in her early years, which I think is why she really gravitates towards women now — because she had to deal with so much bullshit from dudes. Everyone in Prada are all huge dog guys. Having her around, that spirit, is just super cool.

FAVORITE BEVERAGE

*** coffee**

When I was an angsty scene kid in high school, one of the few friends I had, her and I would go to Waffle House before school on Fridays and have a cup of coffee. I've always had a taste for it. Then coming to Chicago, where it has such a scene and so many great roasters, it became very much a part of my routine. My brand Dogma started when I met Xavier [Alexander] of Metric Coffee. We started with a mug and a Colombian coffee that did really well. ... I take what I taste in the coffee, what sort of vision [I have] for the coffee, and present it to whoever I'm partnering with, be it [custom coffee blends for] a band like Protomartyr or a label like The Flenser.

FAVORITE SIDE HUSTLE

*** woodworking**

My old man has always done woodworking. When I was growing up in suburban Ohio, he had a shop space. I decided to pick it [back] up around COVID since I was stuck at home. I just started building things for friends. It got to the point where I was making so many [pieces], and having issues with money, so I decided to start selling them. The next thing I knew I was building bigger pieces and bathroom vanities and whatnot. I certainly have ideas that I'd love to knock out — I've always wanted a library. I lack the words to express how excited I'd be to build something like that in my lifetime.

FAVORITE MASOCHISM

*** hockey**

I've always been really passionate about the game. I lost touch with it in high school because I was small, and turning more into a scene kid. Now I play forward, usually winger. I also play goalie, and I'm absolutely atrocious. I don't know how goalies are good. But it's a really fun masochism. It's like getting tattooed. You're like, "This fucking sucks." Then you walk out of the shop ... "I can't wait to do that again." During COVID I got the itch to make clothes again after seeing a lapse in good design for people that love hockey. I started the brand Hacksaw with Anthony Barlich, who's a very close friend, and it gives us something to grind at.

FAVORITE HIPPIE ACTIVITY

*** tending plants**

It seemed like the thing you had to do as a resident in Chicago was buy a bunch of fucking plants. These days [since moving to Milwaukee], it's such a huge part of my routine, whether it's putting different ones out on the porch to get more sunlight or misting them a certain day of the week. People [will] ask, "What do you miss on tour?" Obviously friends and loved ones, but I really miss tending to my plants. It's just a part of my hippie lifestyle alongside composting and the recent acquisition of a rain barrel that I'm really into.

FAVORITE WAY TO SEE A CITY

*** vinyl shopping**

I was always attracted to physical media. In my late teens, I had hundreds of CDs. I'd get my paycheck from Dairy Queen and run to Best Buy to buy a CD. I don't think there's a much better way to see a city than going to record stores. I remember buying a Mogwai record in Japan with additional songs and crazy packaging. Our last tour, I walked a mile in 110-degree weather in Phoenix and got to the shittiest record store ever. But that's the exception to the rule. Usually, it's going to be rad.

FAVORITE WAY TO MEDITATE

*** playing guitar**

Playing guitar for me is like exercising, kind of turning off in a meditative way. I got the Sunn cab from Nick Gauthier in Harm's Way. I bought my Model T, I think, for $400. Now that sells for $4,000, which is goofy. I like to almost troll with it and just play my Marshall and piss people off; people saying, "That poser singer in Prada has a Model T. He doesn't *deserve* it," or some shit like that. Most of the guitars I play are either EGCs or Travis Beans. I just got addicted to those guitars. I got my first one in like 2013 and I've gotten to know Kevin [Burkett] who makes them. I know King Buzzo says if he's picking up a guitar, he's writing. He doesn't just jam or something. I'm basically the whole opposite side of that. Ⓡ

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MY LIFE STORY

Lzzy Hale

Halestorm's leader recounts her unlikely rise from shy small-town farm girl to global rock & roll star

TEXT Emma Madden

AS A CHILD, LZZY HALE'S GREATEST FEAR WAS RAISING HER VOICE. SHE LONGED to be invisible, never putting her hand up in class, refusing to even call out for help. During a fire safety lesson at kindergarten, Hale's teacher made the class shout, "Fire! Fire!" so they could practice being heard in case there was a blaze. While the rest of Hale's classroom peers could be heard from down the hall, Hale's voice wouldn't reach beyond a barely audible whimper. Had there been a fire, she would have been singed.

Today, the Halestorm leader's iconic yell is her calling card. It's a powerful elemental force that has made her one of the most popular, recognizable vocalists in modern heavy music. Hearing her now — and watching her hold court on stages across the world — it's almost hard to imagine Hale as a shy and anxiety-ridden little girl growing up in small-town Pennsylvania. "I struggled with a lot of self-confidence issues. I didn't want to be loud. I just wanted to quietly move through life," she says over a Zoom call, her voice clear and sonorous. Hale is an immediately warming presence, listening to each question intently and frequently letting out a hearty laugh.

Halestorm, which has now been a part of Hale's life far longer than it hasn't, is the ultimate weapon in her self-empowerment arsenal. The band she formed with her brother, drummer Arejay, when they were just kids has not only given Hale her voice, but her livelihood, too. It even brought Hale her partner, Joe Hottinger, the band's longtime guitarist.

Touring has always been Halestorm's M.O. They're known for their packed schedule, often playing upwards of 250 shows annually. Over 20-plus years, they've shared stages with numerous hard-rock and metal giants — from Alice Cooper and Heaven & Hell to Disturbed, Avenged Sevenfold and more. Their records also began making a major dent in the charts around a decade ago, when their 2012 sophomore album *The Strange Case Of...* peaked at No. 15 on the *Billboard* 200. The following year, the album's lead single "Love Bites (So Do I)" took home the Grammy for Hard Rock/Metal Performance. Ever since, the band have established themselves as a mainstay within the heavy-rock world, as well as a firm representative for it: They've consistently provided an accessible gateway into the realm of hard rock for outsiders. This year, Halestorm released their fifth album, *Back From the Dead,* a record on which they channeled the COVID anxieties they felt during the past two years of quasi-isolation — a time when they were forced to get to know themselves as people rather than as performers. The album continued the band's dominance, with singles reaching the top spots on *Billboard*'s Mainstream Rock Airplay chart.

Hale herself, with her unrivaled vocals, has been tapped for scores of high-profile collabs with everyone from Dream Theater, Stone Sour and Mark Morton to Evanescence, Eric Church and Machine Gun Kelly. Knowing she has the world listening, Hale has also used her voice to champion LGBTQI visibility and mental health awareness. She's a trailblazer for women in rock, too, encouraging young girls to pick up a guitar and follow in her footsteps — something that Gibson recognized when they chose her to become their first female brand ambassador.

This year is the 25th anniversary of Hale and her brother's first show together as Halestorm, and to mark the occasion she sat down with *Revolver* to take a look back at the key moments of her life that turned her into the woman she longed to be when she was a young child.

JIMMY FONTAINE

FIRST THINGS FIRST: WHEN AND WHERE WERE YOU BORN?

LZZY HALE I was born just outside of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on October 10th, 1983. My parents then decided to move to a log cabin in the woods when I was nine. It was one bedroom, one bathroom, one living room, with no neighbors for 10 miles in any direction, along the Appalachian Trail. I was a farm girl for a second before the music bug really took hold and then we sold off sheep and chickens to buy our first PA system. Our first trailer was the donkey trailer, all our equipment smelled like hay for a long period of time.

I'D IMAGINE THAT GROWING UP ON A FARM ALSO TAUGHT YOU ABOUT THE CIRCLE OF LIFE PRETTY EARLY. Yeah, I think so. It being right there, in your face. And then also when you got attached … There was one little lamb who I named Snickers because it had the coloring of a Snickers bar — and I dubbed it mine. My little buddy. He ended up not making it. It's the circle of life. I learned a lot about that through living on a farm.

STEPPING BACK A BIT: DO YOU RECALL YOUR FIRST MEMORY? I remember quite far back. My earliest memories begin when I was about three. I remember my mom being pregnant with my little brother. She was really sick; my little brother did a number on my mom! [*Laughs*] I remember when my little brother came home from the hospital. I was comprehending it all, like, OK, now I have this little brother and I have to help take care of him. That's my earliest memory. I tend to remind him of that. Like, "Hey! My life kind of began with you."

DO YOU REMEMBER ANY OF YOUR DREAMS AS A KID? It's funny because later on, when we first started the band, I started paying more attention to my dreams as they would inspire songs. There was one that we ended up writing a song about called "Time Man." I had a dream I was in an elevator and there was this scary looking bellhop who was trying to put me down and remind me of all the things I didn't like about myself. And this song was kind of like me sticking it to him.

DID TIME MAN EVER COME BACK AFTER YOU WROTE THAT SONG ABOUT HIM? No, he did not. I shooed him away. We ended up recording it on our first-ever cassette tape as Halestorm, so he made it onto the record. That was the last I ever saw him. It's funny how I've rediscovered that even through writing this last record — writing is a type of therapy. If you can put all of the puzzle pieces together and you write the song, you can set those issues aside. There's a sense of relief.

WHEN DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER THE THERAPEUTIC POTENTIAL OF SONG-WRITING? It was shortly before we started the band. I'd started writing songs, and my dad gave me this four-track recorder. I was always a very shy kid. If we go back in time here — because my mom just reminded me of this story — I was in kindergarten and the teachers were trying to help us learn to yell for the fireman if there was a fire. Apparently, my mom had to be called because I wouldn't yell, which is ironic because I kind of make my living yelling now.

COURTESY OF LZZY HALE

"In the summer of 1997, we did a county fair talent show. We went up and did a song. We got the third-place trophy and lost to the tap-dancing cowgirl — who was much cuter than we were. I just found the trophy, actually. It's next to the Grammy, but it's of equal importance."
— Lzzy Hale

Lzzy Hale, (opposite page, left) age one. "My dad says that I either have Van Halen or Cheap Trick on," (opposite page, right) Hale at the family piano, Southampton, Pennsylvania; (right) cover photo of Halestorm's *Forecast for the Future* cassette. "I was called to the principal's office more than once for passing these out in my middle school hallways. We knew nothing about the business. No rich uncle with connections. We just dove in head first — and never looked back."

DO YOU REMEMBER THE FIRST TIME YOU WERE TOLD THAT YOU HAD A TALENT? Yeah, my parents were always really encouraging. I started singing little songs around the time I was about nine. I'd sing in church; I was in choir for a second. I was always good at staying in key. The church director told me I had a voice, though it wasn't what it is now.

Really shortly after that — my brother was always really good on drums — so we started playing together. And then, literally 25 years ago, in the summer of 1997, we decided to have a show outside of our parents' home at a county fair talent show. On the way to the show, my little brother said, "We have to have a band name!" And I said, "OK, what do you want to call it?" And we named it Halestorm.

We went up and did a song that we had written together, a five-minute song called "Love Is Power" with a drum solo in the middle of it. We got the third-place trophy and lost to the tap-dancing cowgirl — who was much cuter than we were. I just found the trophy, actually. It's next to the Grammy, but it's of equal importance.

YOU SAID GROWING UP YOU HAD A DIFFERENT VOICE WHILE SINGING IN THE CHURCH. HOW DID YOU LAND ON THE ONE YOU HAVE NOW? WAS THERE A MOMENT WHEN YOU THOUGHT, OK, NOW *THIS* IS MY VOICE? Maybe 15, 16, just playing in the bars. Maybe it was just because I was competing with a lot of loud noise, but I realized that I could push myself further than what I had been doing before. Really, that came with the stage-presence thing too. Around 15, I started doing this experiment … I wanted to have a presence like the people I grew up listening to, like Pat Benatar, so instead of looking at the audience as a whole lot of people, I would start picking out one person at a time and literally staring them down. I remember that being such an intense thing for me to do, almost like a staring contest. But usually — because I was the one with the microphone — they would look away first. So that gave me a sense of power, and then I would start pushing the envelope.

I remember there being a small almost tri-tone crack in my voice when it started to get a little more guttural, and I thought, *Oooh*, that's something different. Also, when I was 16, we had a guitar player who left, and I was like, *Agh!* Man! We're never gonna find another guitarist. So I thought, You know what, we have gigs coming up, I'm just gonna learn how to play guitar. So I did it almost out of necessity. From there, I started making a loud noise on guitar and then that ended up influencing a little bit more of a harder voice.

WHAT DID THE BAND'S EARLY DAYS LOOK LIKE, YOU KNOW, GOING FROM JUST PLAYING FOR THE HELL OF IT TO SELLING YOURSELF AS AN IDEA TO STRANGERS? I suppose I was in my late teens when things were really starting to develop. We went to music conferences in Philadelphia. We wanted to learn how to promote CDs and how to cope with touring.

We met Joe and Josh [Smith], our current guitarist and bassist, around this time. And that's when Halestorm really started to become what it is now. I remember, we were showcasing for everybody, Epic Records, Columbia Records, you name it. They all kind of said the same thing: Because I was a girl in hard rock they didn't know what to do with me. This was before Amy Lee broke out and shattered the glass in

COURTESY OF LZZY HALE

Hale, age 11, with her brother Arejay on the family's 20-acre Pennsylvania farm riding "an adopted, half-blind, retired police horse named Daryl."

the hard-rock scene. We stuck it out. Finally, in '05, we ended up signing a deal with Atlantic. That was an interesting choice, too, because at the time, we were doing about 200-250 gigs a year on our own. We were spiraling out, opening up for some national acts, so we had to make the decision. We could keep doing this on our own and be super DIY, or we could go with the big guns and see what this whole record deal was about. So when they popped the question, we were like, alright, sure.

WHEN DID YOU START RECORDING THAT DEBUT WITH ATLANTIC? We didn't start recording right away. It was our then-A&R guy's idea — we'd recorded a five-song EP in 2005 [*One and Done*] — and then we went right out on the road, opened up for Seether and Shinedown and Trapt, all the bands of that time. We stayed on the road for quite a bit and then we finally settled into writing the first [self-titled] album in 2007. We went out to California to talk to producers and that was such a long period of time because that was when the industry was changing. Everyone was trying to figure out how to combat the digital scene. There were a lot of people being let go, our A&R guy got fired, there were all these peers on our label getting dropped. We were stuck in California at the Oakwoods apartments. The first producer we were talking to dropped out of the project and we just kept writing and writing. From the time we got stranded in California to the time we finished our first album was about 19 months. There was a mudslide, there was a fire, two earthquakes; the whole thing was a mess. Then we finally debuted it in 2009.

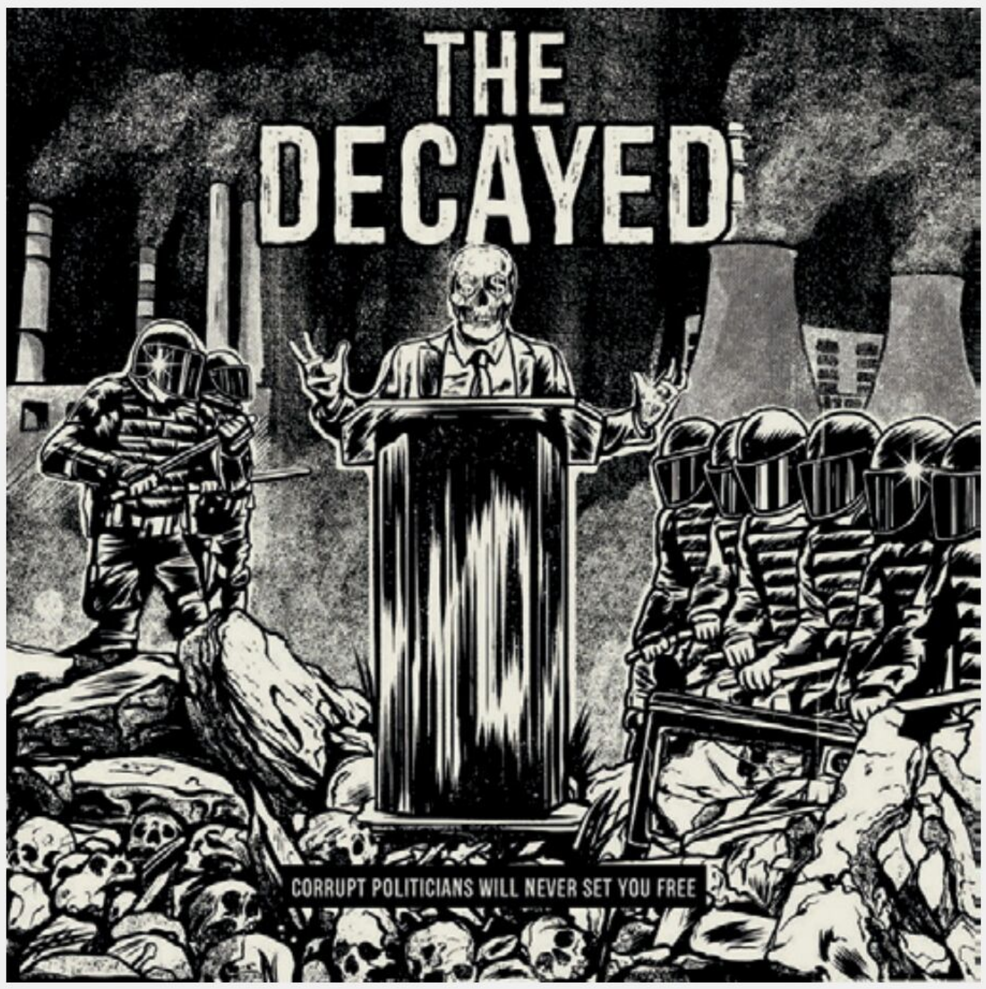
YOUR SECOND ALBUM, 2012'S *THE STRANGE CASE OF...* EARNED YOU A GRAMMY. WAS THAT A SURPRISE? DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU WERE EVEN ON THE RECORDING ACADEMY'S RADAR? Not at all. It was quite a shock. We were in Madison, Wisconsin, playing a show. I sat down at my piano to do a couple songs by myself. Our sound guy had texted my guitar player's tech to say, "Hey, you guys were just nominated for a Grammy." My guitar player on the side-stage was like, "*What?!*" He had to look it up on his phone. Before I even started one of my piano songs, Joe ran out and yelled in my ear, "Dude! We were nominated for a Grammy!" And I must have had this look on my face like somebody died because the audience was like, What? What happened?! And I just turned to the audience and was like, "Guys ... I guess we were just nominated for a Grammy." And the place just erupted.

We saw who we were up against: all of our idols and heavy hitters. I literally sat down and had a very adult conversation with the boys, like, "Guys, let's not get our hopes up about the Grammys. We're definitely not gonna win it, but we're gonna go. We've gotten invited to a bunch of these parties where we definitely don't belong. We can just celebrate the accomplishment of being nominated."

Then the time comes when we're sitting there, our category comes up, and they say, "The Grammy goes to..." We were listening for Halestorm because we didn't realize they said the song title first, so we heard the L of "Love Bites (So Do I)" and thought, Oh, well it wasn't us. And then we were like, Oh, wait! That was us! [*Laughs*]

DID YOU GET TO MEET ANY OF YOUR IDOLS AT THOSE AFTER-PARTIES? We met a lot of people who weren't necessarily our heroes but who were definitely out of our league. There were a couple parties where Sting was hanging out, and like, Katy Perry and John Mayer and Quincy Jones. After a couple glasses of wine, I did go over and introduce myself to Katy Perry because my mindset was like, You know

COURTESY OF LZZY HALE



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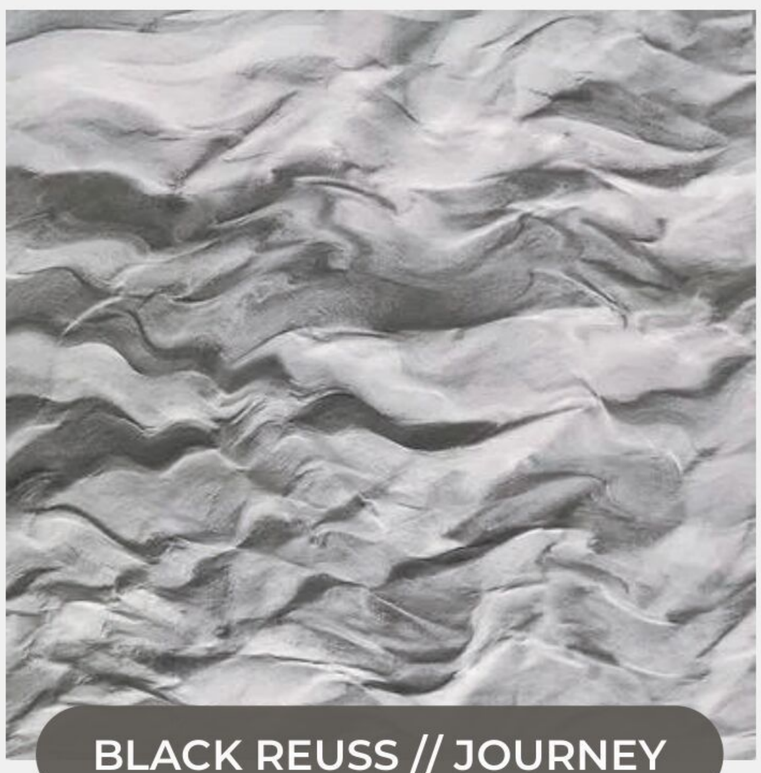
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Liepaja, LATVIA

what? She's not going to remember me. So, I went up — I think a little too aggressively [*Laughs*] — and was like, "Hey! My name's Lzzy Hale. I'm in a band called Halestorm. We just won our first Grammy. I just wanted to say hi." She just looked at me — smoking a cigarette, letting out a puff of smoke — and said, "Alright." We also got to have a conversation with Quincy Jones, and he was really sweet. He didn't brush us off. He was like, "Oh, that's amazing. You have to stick it out. You have to keep doing this." It was such a fun time because everything on that level was super new, and since then I've gotten to do so many different events at the Grammys. We got nominated again for our last album cycle [2018's *Vicious*], and they let me host for a category. So I got to give away some Grammys. It's just interesting how now that's like a part of my life, being a part of the Recording Academy. But at the time I didn't even know they knew who I was.

I THINK IT WAS IN 2015 WHEN YOU FIRST TOLD YOUR FANS YOU WERE BISEXUAL, RIGHT? HAD YOU BEEN HAVING THAT CONVERSATION WITH YOURSELF FOR A WHILE? I was having that conversation in my head since I was a teenager. It's funny, I had such a Rob Halford moment, like when he came out as gay during an interview kind of by accident. I had gotten to a moment in my life through writing songs and being in this band that I was definitely more confident being unapologetic about who I am — and who I am inside. And then I remember somebody asking, "So, how do you identify?" And I replied, "Well, actually..." And I just said it. My bandmates knew, my parents knew, but I think that was really the first time I was directly asked. I was just honest about it. And the beautiful thing about being honest about who you are is that I got a lot of people from the community saying, "Oh, that's amazing. Now I have somebody I can see myself in." That's been a huge gift.

There's a song on our new album called "Strange Girl" that was directly inspired by a conversation with a young 15-year-old who had just come out as gay right before lockdown. She was stuck with her parents the whole time [and they] were not having it. So I had this conversation with her and said, "Hey, I'm in your boat." I took that conversation into one of our writing sessions, and wrote her an anthem that she could wake up to every morning and think, Right, not only am I confident in myself, but I also have this buddy. She has me. She's not alone.

AS YOU GROW OLDER, DO YOU FEEL YOU'RE GETTING CLOSER TO YOUR CORE SELF, OR MAYBE WHO YOU ASPIRED TO BECOME AS A CHILD? I think so. If my 13-year-old self could see me now — I think I am the person she wanted to be. Through this band and all of the challenges I've faced and all the different lifetimes I've had to live through to get here — yeah, I think that I was always striving to be the person I am now. I've realized the importance of keeping that inner child as my north star, because if you lose that you lose the whole reason that you're in this. So, I think the further on I go, the closer I get to her. Ⓡ

SCOTT LEGATO/GETTY IMAGES

LORNA SHORE

CENTURY MEDIA

LORNA SHORE. PAIN REMAINS. 10.14.2022

Animals as Leaders' Tosin Abasi with his McLaren 720S

Djent Car Club

A look at the fast-paced lives – and high-performance rides – of Animals as Leaders' Tosin Abasi and Periphery's Misha Mansoor

TEXT Sammi Chichester
PHOTOGRAPHY Ekaterina Gorbacheva

FOR MISHA MANSOOR CARS CAME BEFORE GUITARS – HE DOESN'T REMEMBER a time when he wasn't transfixed by them. "The first time that I saw a Ferrari in real life was a 348, and that was like meeting your hero. I was starstruck," says the Periphery axman, who was then eight years old and living in Belgium. He recalls looking through the dealership's window with his dad. "I asked, 'Can we buy one?' not really understanding the concept of money." He laughs.

Mansoor's fixation on fast cars trailed him into adulthood. So, naturally, when he began making his own money there was no question about what he was going to spend it on. "I never thought I would be able to own a fast car … So when I realized that I *might* be able to swing this, it was like, 'Damn, I *have* to do this.'" That first ride was a BMW M3 E90, which was followed over the years by a revolving collection of AMG, Lamborghini, Ferrari, Porsche and McLaren sports cars.

It's a passion he shares with longtime friend and fellow guitarist Tosin Abasi of Animals as Leaders. The two first bonded over their love of Meshuggah riffs and crazy futuristic guitar gear, which eventually led to Mansoor producing a few of AAL's albums. While making the modern djent genre-buster *Joy of Motion*, Mansoor picked up Abasi from the airport in that newly acquired BMW M3 and punched it. "That was probably the first time I felt 400 horsepower at full throttle," Abasi recalls, laughing.

Abasi's fascination with cars also started when he was just a kid. "I think some of these vehicles blurred the lines between things we would see [in] cartoons, superhero stuff or comic books," he explains. "It's almost when you're into science fiction and you're yearning for some of the things you've seen in the movies … to trickle into the real world."

Like his pal, Abasi has owned a bunch of sports cars, too. His favorite is his current McLaren 720S. "It seemed the design language in the 720S really merged elegance with aerodynamics," he says. "It is a supercar in every quintessential sense of the word … I can hardly believe it's legal to own one because of how quick it is. [*Laughs*] But I really respect, as a street car, the amount of advanced engineering that seems to have trickled down from racing."

Mansoor's also a big fan of McLarens (he recently traded his 720S Spider for a 765LT Spider) and the dudes regularly meet to talk shop, enjoy track days at the famous Laguna Seca raceway or take some "spirited" drives through the "twisties" of the Southern California canyons. The thrills they experience from their high-performance vehicles isn't all that different from the complex, technical, virtuosic music they make.

"I gravitate heavily towards Porsche and McLaren because those are the two nerdiest brands for drivers," Mansoor says with a laugh. "If you were looking at music, those would be like the prog-nerd guitarists' guitars."

"The way I play — with speed and precision and all of that shit — it's not practical," adds Abasi. "And the car isn't practical. But I like that there are some things that exist that aren't practical: They exist as an example of what's possible." Ⓡ

Periphery's Misha Mansoor; (below) Mansoor's McLaren 765LT Spider in Miami Blue

"For me, I want an experience. It's less about having the car, owning it or showing off. Whether it's a basic drive, going through the canyons or the track, I want a car that puts a smile on my face, that gets me in my zone. That just makes my chest filled with warmth and there's only certain cars that can do that."
— Misha Mansoor

(from left) Abasi's McLaren 720S, which was recently wrapped in light gray from its factory-original Azores Orange; Mansoor's first McLaren 720S Spider

"The McLaren 720S is almost a car version of what I try to do with metal," says Abasi. "It pushes the envelope aesthetically and performance-wise. It has a combination of traits that feel new and modern."

"I'll never forget realizing how much of a difference the sound to think of it as a musician — distortion through a really

adds to your experience of driving. Then I almost started loud amplifier — it's not just noise to us." — Tosin Abasi

(from left) Abasi's McLaren 720S and Mansoor's Porsche 911 GT3 Touring in Miami Blue

Abasi (second row, on left) and Mansoor (second row, on right) in their McLarens, Laguna Seca raceway, Monterey, California, 2022

Abasi driving his McLaren through Laguna Seca's famous turn 8, the Corkscrew. "Psychologically, it's a little disconcerting," he says of the blind turn and elevation drop, "because there's self-preservation, and there's car preservation and then there's your ego."

"When we got to Laguna, Tosin and I showed up in two 720Ss and they're like, 'Oh, man. That's so cool! Last week, there were two 720Ss. They both crashed. One crashed at turn 1, the other one crashed at turn 9. Totaled.' I'm like, 'This is a great start to the day.'"
— Mansoor

"I'm looking at McLaren for design cues. I love that McLaren is so aesthetically aggressive. When I'm designing guitars for Abasi Concepts, I want the equivalent of that in a guitar."
— Abasi

"It's just this wonderful analog experience," Mansoor says of his Porsche's naturally aspirated engine. "It's like playing through a nice tube amp full stack. Everything is just very tactile."

Q&A: Mike Patton

The eclectic vocalist on the tragedies and triumphs surrounding Dead Cross' new album and why his career is "a fucked-up mixtape"

TEXT J. Bennett
PHOTOGRAPHY Becky DiGiglio

"NAPS ARE SO INVALUABLE. THAT'S ONE THING I'VE LEARNED AS I'VE GOTTEN older." That's Mike Patton, vocalist extraordinaire for punk supergroup Dead Cross, alt-metal legends Faith No More and bizarro-thrash wizards Mr. Bungle — plus way too many other bands and projects to list. He's here to speak with *Revolver* about *Dead Cross II*, the appropriately titled second album from the band he's in with former Slayer drummer Dave Lombardo, the Locust vocalist-bassist Justin Pearson and Retox guitarist Michael Crain. But first? The sweet science of naps. "It helps if you have two French bulldogs like I do," he says. "They're almost like a sleeping pill. The snoring is insane, but as soon as I lay down with them, I have to set my alarm so I only nap for an hour. Otherwise, I'm out."

Four-legged sedatives aside, the pandemic years haven't been easy on Patton or his collaborators. In 2021, the singer cancelled Faith No More and Mr. Bungle tours citing mental health reasons — he's been in therapy and feeling better these days — but that wasn't all. When it came time to record *Dead Cross II*, Crain was diagnosed with cancer. Somehow, the guitarist pushed through and recorded his parts while receiving treatment. By the time the album was finished, original Dead Cross vocalist Gabe Serbian — Pearson's longtime friend and bandmate in the Locust — passed away suddenly.

"I don't think anybody saw that coming," Patton says. "Gabe was someone I always wanted to work with. Forget about vocals — he was a drummer for the ages. I had a soundtrack project I wanted to hire him for, but it didn't work out. It was like, 'OK, we'll do it next time.' But that next time never came. There's a lot of regret there. He was a fucking great guy."

In the wide-ranging interview that follows, Patton discusses soldiering through pandemic-era challenges, using music to confront "Trump nonsense," the similarities between being Faith No More and Dead Cross' "replacement singer" and more.

THE MUSIC ON THE FIRST DEAD CROSS ALBUM WAS WRITTEN BEFORE YOU WERE INVOLVED. THIS TIME, IT WAS UNDERSTOOD THAT YOU WOULD BE THE VOCALIST BEFORE WORK EVEN BEGAN. HOW DID THAT AFFECT THE PROCESS?
MIKE PATTON I don't know if it affected the way the music was approached, but it definitely affected my approach. I'd been a replacement singer another time, with another band. [*Laughs*] That was Faith No More, and our first record took off. It was a great success. Then, once I dug my teeth into it on the second record and integrated better, that's when we found our collective voice. And I would say the same with this band. The first record was like, "Here's the music — go!" That's not to say it was a rush job, but this one was a lot more thoughtful and methodical. And it took a lot longer due to the pandemic.

THE PANDEMIC HAS AFFECTED EVERYONE, BUT HOW SPECIFICALLY DID IT AFFECT YOU GUYS? Oh, many levels. I can only start by saying that our guitar player had COVID, and then he got diagnosed with cancer. That was really rough. But the trooper that he is — I'm talking about Michael Crain — he pushed through it. He'd be going to treatments and then coming to the studio. I wasn't there because I did my vocals in San Francisco, and they were recording in L.A. But the fact that he did that… I think you can hear every bit of pain, frustration, anxiety and anguish. He's one of the principal songwriters, so the fact that he pushed through that was totally amazing and inspiring.

WHEN YOU FOUND OUT ABOUT HIS DIAGNOSIS, WAS THERE ANY PART OF YOU THAT THOUGHT, MAYBE WE SHOULDN'T BE DOING THIS NOW? Yeah, of course. I think we all said, "Your life is a little more important than this fucking record." But he was intent on doing it. It was his therapy in a way. And it healed him — it really did. But he was very headstrong about it. He said, "I'm gonna do my best, and we're gonna get through this." And he did. Looking back on it — this

Dead Cross, (clockwise from top left) Dave Lombardo, Mike Patton, Justin Pearson and Michael Crain

is a couple years ago — it really made me think I had to step up my game. This guy has cancer and he's doing the record anyway. I wouldn't have. I would've been like, "See ya later!" I wouldn't have had the balls. So, it was inspirational and courageous and just kind of incredible. Hopefully you can hear that in the music.

AND HE'S RECOVERED NOW? He's totally fucking cured. Somehow, maybe the music helped him. I don't know. I'm not a doctor. But he looks great, and he sounds great. I think that made this record what it is.

AS YOU KNOW, ORIGINAL DEAD CROSS VOCALIST GABE SERBIAN RECENTLY PASSED. HAS THAT CAST A SHADOW OVER THIS RECORD AT ALL? It's absolutely awful. The record was done before we got the news, but … I don't know. It's hard to really put into words. Me replacing him and him dying, and me replacing Chuck Mosley [in Faith No More] and him dying… It's like, "What am I, the grim reaper?" It really made me think about myself in that way. It's awful. But ultimately, neither had anything to do with me, I hope, but it's really hard, for sure. I made one record with Dead Cross and then Gabe's dead? What the fuck? I could not believe it.

LET'S TALK ABOUT FUN STUFF NOW. *DEAD CROSS II*'S OPENER, "LOVE WITHOUT LOVE," HAS ONE OF YOUR GREATEST LYRICS EVER: "I LOVE YOU SO MUCH THAT I COULD SHIT/HOTTER THAN A BRANDING IRON, COLDER THAN A WITCH'S TIT/LIKE BILLY JOEL, I'LL BE MOVING OUT!" WHAT OR WHO INSPIRED THAT? [*Laughs*] I don't know. It just came out. Maybe some past relationships, something like that. But honestly? It just sounded good. And it worked. It's funny that you say it's the best lyrics I ever wrote! [*Laughs*] It's basically about unrequited love. You love somebody more than that person loves you. That's the bottom line of it. You put in a witch and a branding iron, and there you go.

BILLY JOEL ISN'T THE ONLY MUSICIAN YOU REFERENCE ON THE NEW ALBUM. ON OTHER SONGS, YOU NAME-DROP VINCE NEIL FROM MÖTLEY CRÜE AND PIG CHAMPION FROM POISON IDEA. Wow, you caught that! I also mention Mr. Chi Pig from SNFU, who died during the recording of the album.

THE VINCE NEIL REFERENCE IS FUNNY BECAUSE I'VE ALWAYS KIND OF CONSIDERED YOU THE ANTI–VINCE NEIL … What did I say again? I forget. Wasn't I kind of making fun of him? Oh, yeah: "Like a Vince Neil who sings too many songs." Yeah, like fat, old — we all know where he's at now. I'm conscious of that, and I also fear that I may become that. [*Laughs*] So why not talk about it?

THERE'S A LINE IN THE SONG "NIGHTCLUB CANARY" WHERE YOU'RE TALKING ABOUT "A WORLD WHERE EVERYTHING'S A REMAKE." WAS THERE ANYTHING SPECIFIC THAT GOT YOU THINKING ALONG THOSE LINES? There was this old film noir that I saw that I can't remember the name of — an old black-and-white film. In the movie, there was a singer doing old songs, and the club owner was like, "She's just a nightclub canary." I thought that was a great title, and I never forgot it. It just means you're singing songs that are in the air already. You're not creating. You're just chirping. Which is fine. I don't mind it. But somehow it fit with the song, and I ran with it. We wanted to do a video for that song in a Sixties-style smoky nightclub with background singers and dancers — that Motown look — but I don't think we can afford it. [*Laughs*]

TELL ME ABOUT "CHRISTIAN MISSILE CRISIS." That's a good one, and it's the only tune that I didn't write. Justin wrote that one. One of my objectives with this record was to involve him more as a singer, because that's a weapon. The first record is pretty much all me, so I told him and the band early on that I wanted to make this one a dual-vocal attack. I wanted us to be trading vocals, à la Suicidal [Tendencies] or something like that. And Justin is very humble. He was like, "Are you sure? You're the singer." No, no — we're both singers. I knew this record would be even crazier with us bouncing back and forth. So you hear a lot of that, especially on this song in particular.

THE LYRICS SEEM TO ADDRESS GUN NUTS. Yeah. That's J.P.'s thing. He just sent the lyrics, and I sang 'em. [*Laughs*] But yeah, it seems like it's an anti-gun-crazy song.

YOU ALSO WROTE SOME POLITICAL LYRICS ON THE FIRST DEAD CROSS ALBUM, WHICH IS NOT SOMETHING YOU USUALLY DO. JUSTIN, ON THE OTHER HAND, IS NOT SHY ABOUT HIS POLITICS. DOES HE BRING THAT OUT IN YOU? I don't know — maybe. Maybe it's the times we're living in, with the pandemic and all the Trump nonsense. There's gotta be something to say about this — good, bad or indifferent. But you can't ignore it. Out of respect to my bandmates, who are way more political than I am, it felt like a good thing to do. I don't wanna be a part of any of it. But that song, "Christian Missile Crisis," and a lot of J.P.'s views are strong. And they're good. There's nothing to argue about with me — nothing. If he had given me a right-wing song, I probably would've done it. [*Laughs*] I'm kidding.

YOU'RE TOTALLY UNIQUE IN THE HEAVY-MUSIC WORLD — AND MAYBE EVEN MUSIC IN GENERAL. YOU'VE WORKED WITH BANDS THAT'VE SOLD MILLIONS OF ALBUMS AND HAD GRAMMY NOMINATIONS. YOU DO UNDERGROUND PUNK RECORDS, SOUNDTRACKS, SUPERGROUPS, ALL-VOCAL ALBUMS FOR JOHN ZORN'S LABEL — YOU'VE EVEN SUNG ENTIRE ALBUMS IN OTHER LANGUAGES WITH A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MUSICAL STYLE. I CAN'T THINK OF ANYONE ELSE WHO DOES ALL THAT. WHAT'S THE UNIFYING THEME FOR YOU? Good question. I haven't analyzed it. I do what feels good to me. It's based on sound and aesthetic. To me, all that stuff you mentioned fits together. This is the kind of stuff that I would listen to on a mixtape. So, in a weird way, I guess my career is a fucked-up mixtape. I do what feels right and what sounds right. At the time I joined Dead Cross, I really needed to do that. Now I'm on to some other stuff. Maybe I'm a wanderer. I don't know. I just wanna do justice to every recording or concert that I'm involved in. I wanna do it the right way. Hopefully in an authentic way. Ⓡ

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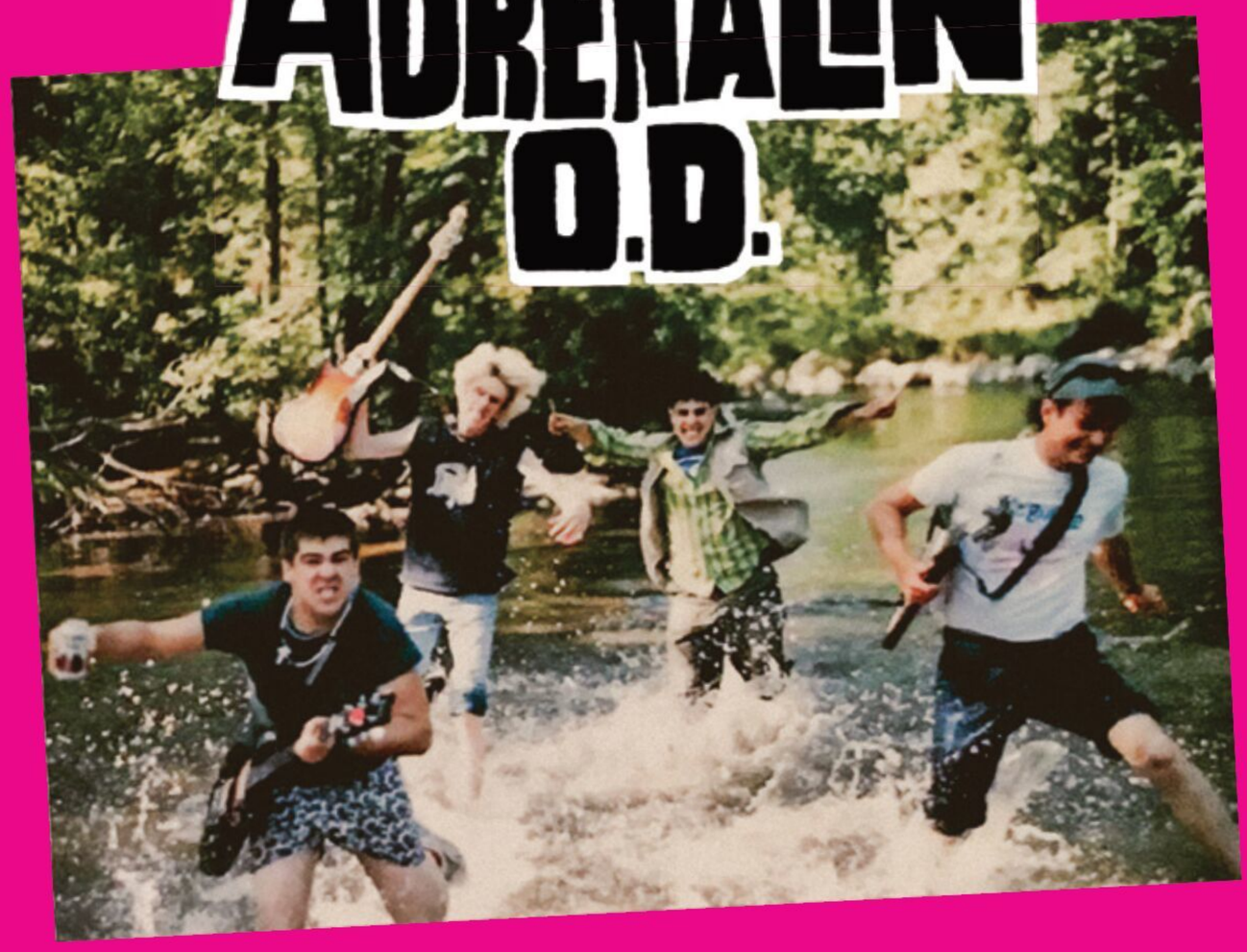

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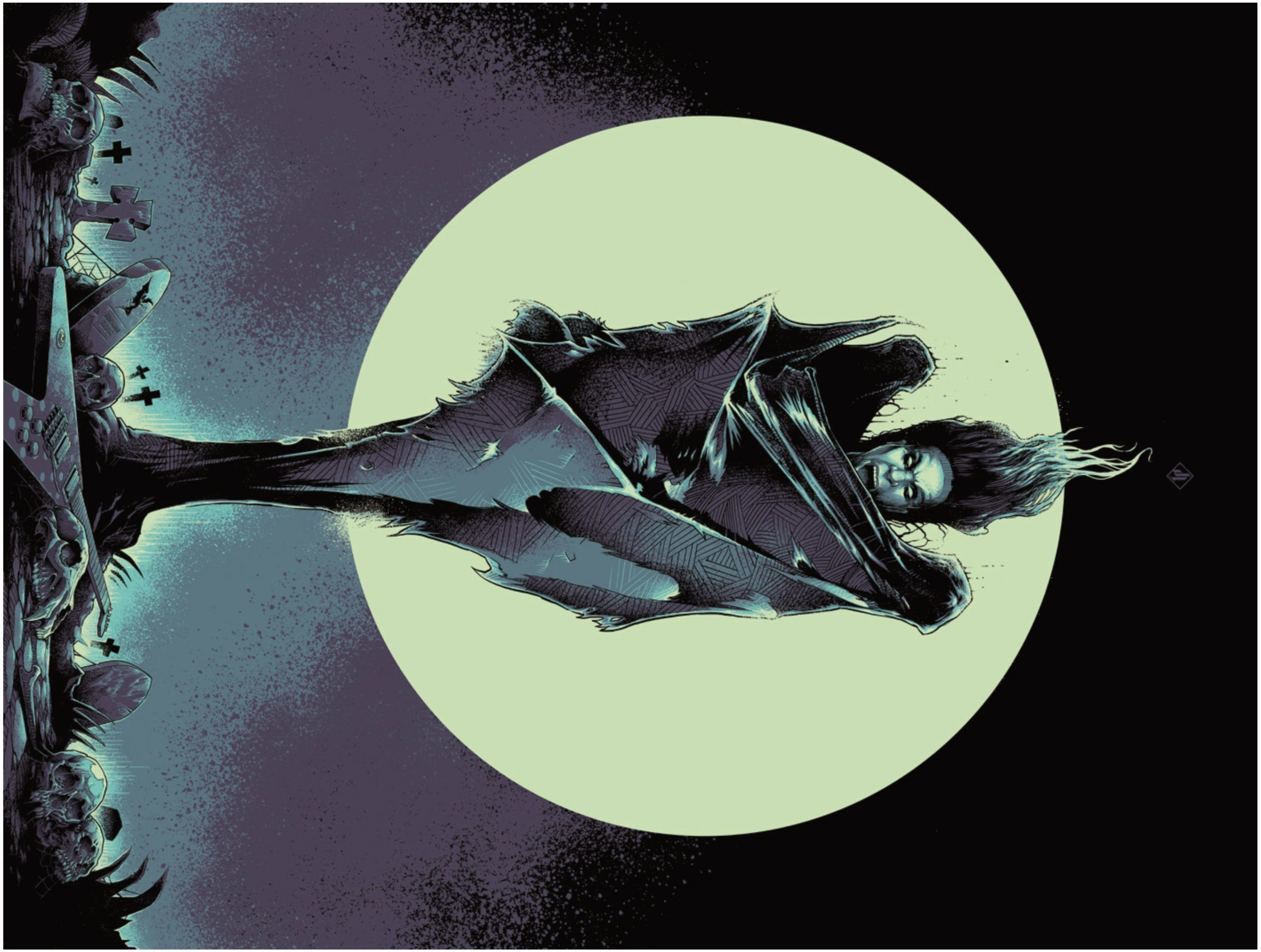

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